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MYSTERIES AND MYTHS OF THE APOLLO MISSIONS



UFO in Earth orbit

Pizza slice?

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7-mile high tower



Crashed alien spaceship

HIDDEN COLOURS

SEEING BEYOND THE VISIBLE SPECTRUM

MEN FROM THE MINISTRY

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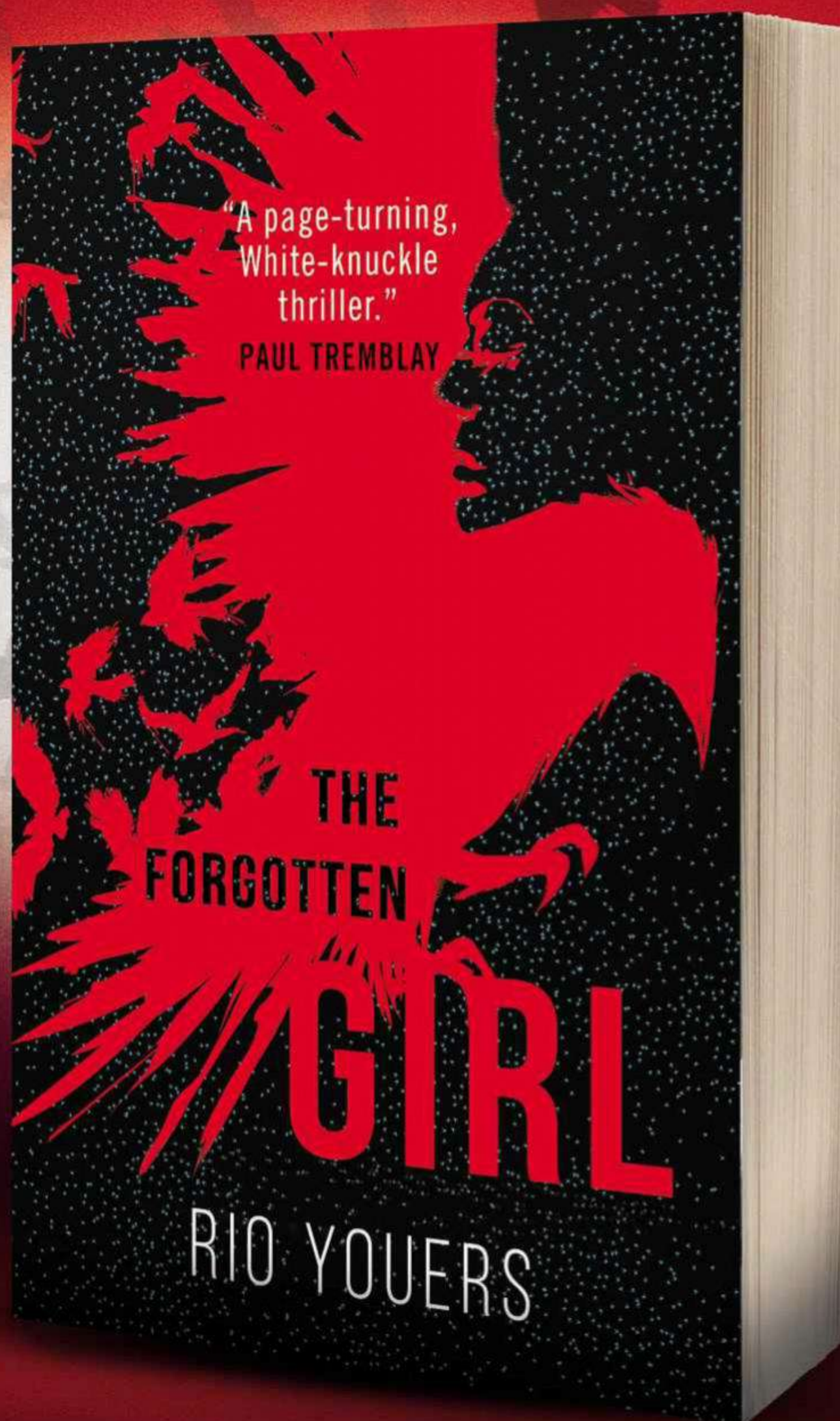
FURRY FREAKS AND FAKES

THE WEIRDER SIDE OF TAXIDERMY



**"AN ABSOLUTE ROCKET...
IT'S A WORK THAT MARKS OUT RIO YOUNG AS A BIG STAR."**

JOE HILL

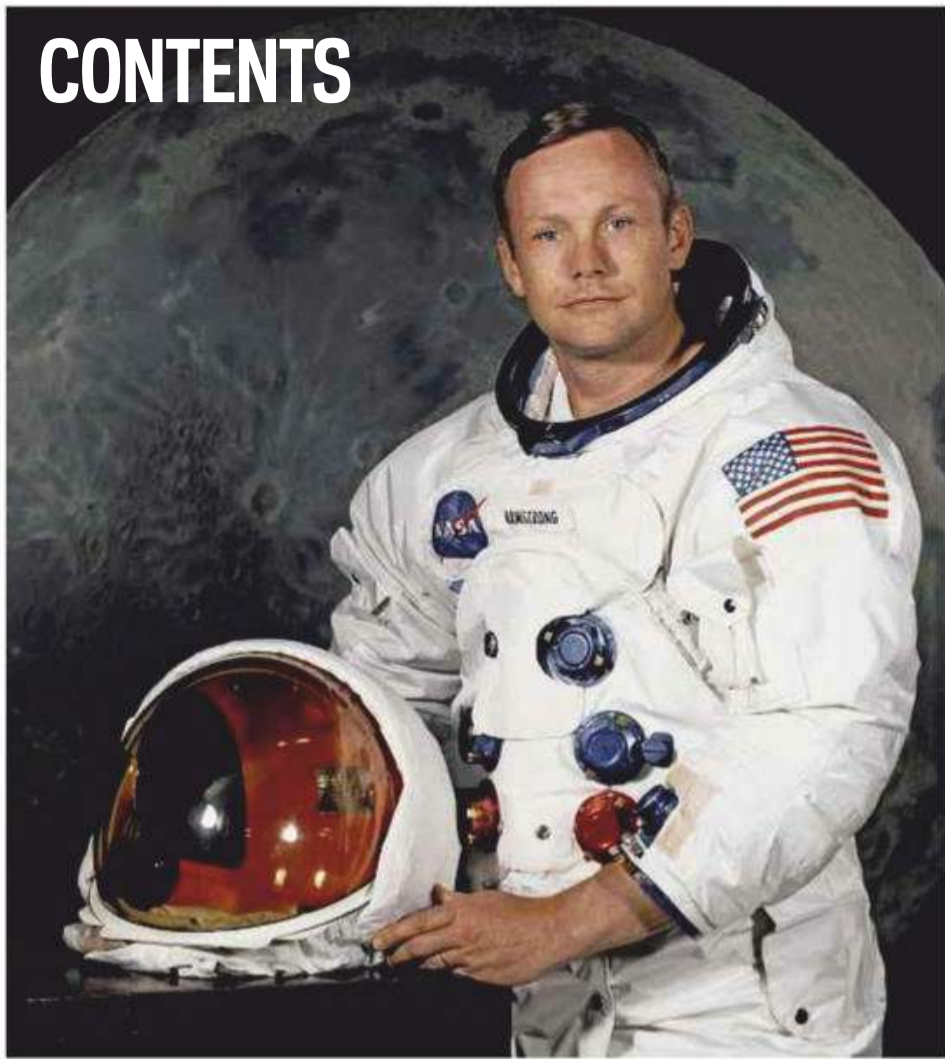


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COVER PHOTO: NASA
FINAL IMAGE COMPOSITION: ETIENNE GILFILLAN



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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

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PUBLISHED BY DENNIS PUBLISHING,
31-32 ALFRED PLACE, LONDON, WC1E 7DP

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PRINTED BY WILLIAM GIBBONS & SONS LTD

DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide
by Seymour Distribution Ltd, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT. Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001
Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £48; Europe £58; Rest of world £68
US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

Fortean Times, ISSN 0308-5899, is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica, NY 114314, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Subscription records are maintained at Dennis Publishing Ltd, 31-32 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7DP, UK.
Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

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Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations.
ABC 13,904 (Jan-Dec 2016)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
© Fortean Times: MAY 2019

EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

MOONING THE FACTS

In July, the world will be marking the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, the first manned spaceflight to put human beings – in this case, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, while Michael Collins piloted the command module – on the Moon.

It remains an incredible, imagination-firing moment in the history of manned flight and space exploration, celebrated ever since in countless books, documentaries and feature films. As Brian J Robb explains in this month's cover story, it was a feat that also fired the imaginations of conspiracy theorists and UFO buffs worldwide; and the photos taken by the Lunar Orbiter in the 1960s and the Clementine satellite in the 1990s have only added impetus to the ongoing search for anomalies and allegedly alien artefacts on the Moon's surface.

Unlike the various strands of conspiracy theory arguing that the Moon landings – or at least the photographic evidence for them – were faked, possibly even shot in a film studio by none other than Stanley Kubrick, the lunar anomaly hunters merely suggest that the crew of Apollo 11 weren't the first to walk on the Moon's surface – as evidenced by the crashed spaceships, tyre tracks, discarded drinks cans and the remains of vast alien structures that can be found by anyone who cares to examine the evidence. Then there are the UFO sightings made by astronauts, the supposed NASA cover-ups, and the missing magnetic tapes found in a dead man's basement in Pennsylvania. We may not be heading back to the Moon anytime soon, but we have no doubt that our nearest neighbour in the Solar System will continue to produce further mysteries, even if some of those described here are finally laid to rest.

Elsewhere in this issue, other forms of lunar enchantment are explored by David Barrett, who visits the Moonscapes exhibition at the Watts Gallery, which explores our relationship to the Moon through Victorian and contemporary art and objects (p24) and Mark Greener, who unravels some of the ancient links between lunar deities, silver and epilepsy (p54).

WIN! COPIES OF TAXIDERM Y

We also look at the twin subjects of teratology and taxidermy with Alexis Turner, the founder of London Taxidermy, as our guide. Alexis has been at the

forefront of the revival of interest in the subject over recent years, and presents some fascinating examples of fake freaks – artfully constructed creatures, ranging from miniature dogs to Feejee Mermaids and pickled baby dragons.

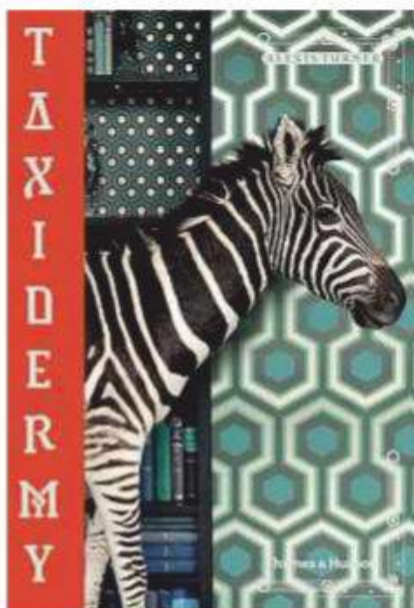
Thanks to Thames and Hudson, we have two copies of Alexis's richly illustrated book *Taxidermy* to give away to FT readers. For a chance to win, just send an email with "Taxidermy Comp" in the header to ftcompetitions@dennis.co.uk with your name and

address. The winning entries will be picked at random. This offer is only available to readers in the UK.

ERRATA

FT376:8: A typographical error in the Sideline titled "Killer Puffer" was spotted by John Fielding, of Parker, Colorado. The puffer fish toxin referred to as "textrodotoxin" should have been "tetrodotoxin".

FT378:66: Chris Josiffe of London pointed out an unfortunate error in the review of SD Tucker's book *Forgotten Science*, which refers to "the Nazi Party's exploitation of fringe scientism and the mystical racism of Isaac Rosenberg". Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918) was a poet and artist, mostly remembered as one of Britain's great poets of World War I – a conflict that claimed his life. The man whose racial theories were a major influence on the Nazi Party – which he led during the period of Hitler's imprisonment in the 1920s – was Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946), who was sentenced to death and hanged at Nuremberg in 1946 for war crimes and crimes against humanity.



David R Sutton

Bob Rickard

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MUG



TEA TOWEL

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

BENYAHON'S CULT OF BURPERS

Somerset branch of Australia's "socially harmful cult" is run by female reincarnation of Churchill

Simon Williams, 46, an Old Etonian accountant, has stood down from his role as President of the Chamber of Commerce in Frome, Somerset, following a BBC investigation into Universal Medicine (UM), a cult of which he is a follower – or “student” as UM devotees are called. Williams owns the Lighthouse, a four-star bed-and-breakfast establishment in Tytherington, near Frome, which serves as the European headquarters of UM. The cult was founded in Australia in 1999 by Uruguayan-born Serge Benhayon, 55, a once-bankrupt tennis coach and twice-married father of four. Benhayon has claimed to be the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci, Pythagoras, Imhotep, Saint Peter – and the theosophist Alice Bailey, whose methods of esoteric healing he has made use of.

The organisation is mainly located in Goonellabah and Wollongbar in New South Wales. Students of UM believe in “esoteric breast massage”, “esoteric ovary massage”, “charka-puncture”, and burping up evil spirits. They go to bed at 9pm and rise at 3am, and avoid carrots, alcohol, coffee, dairy products and gluten. Food has to be stirred anti-clockwise to get rid of “entities”. UM teaches that disease is caused by energetic disharmony resulting from bad choices made in this and previous lifetimes. People are sexually abused due to past life actions, people with autism were former dictators, and women who exercise vigorously risk ruining their fertility. Benhayon believes Audis are the only “energetically

balanced” car in the world. He asserts that music such as rock, reggae, pop, funk, rap and the work of JS Bach contain pranic energy, and therefore must be avoided. Around 2,000 people worldwide are thought to be students of UM, 200 of whom are in the UK. (These include Otto Bathurst, a film-maker who won a Bafta for his work on the BBC drama *Peaky Blinders*, and Tricia Nicholson, great granddaughter of tobacco magnate Alfred Dunhill.) UM doctrine is called “The Way of the Livingness” and followers are known collectively as “The Student Body”.

For Benhayon, esoterically correct thoughts and behaviour are rewarded with improved reincarnations, while the contrary are punished with disease and adversity. He has been heavily influenced by Louise Hay, author of *You Can Heal Your Life*, who claims to have cured herself of cervical cancer without medical treatment. Her 35 million customers don't seem to care that she can't provide evidence. A typical Hay utterance: “The way to control your life is to control your choice of words and thoughts.”

According to the website Universal Medicine Accountability: “Universal Medicine deceptively markets its healing services as complementary medicine when they are in truth body negative and life denying practices aimed at hastening death. Serge Benhayon's puritanical magical thinking keeps followers in a state of paranoia and dread, where they believe minor emotional



infractions are the cause of their illnesses and misfortunes. Writings on Universal Medicine's propaganda sites on followers' experience of cancer and their attitudes to death reveal existential confusion. The conflict instilled by Benhayon's teachings sees them veering between self flagellation and grandiosity, consoling themselves with the belief they are being cleansed in preparation for an elevated rebirth.”

Benhayon's legal trouble began when UM survivor Esther Rockett blogged in 2014 about her traumatic experience of the cult and claimed he indecently touched her during an “ovarian reading”, and had abused others. Benhayon responded by launching a defamation suit against her. Last November, an Australian Supreme Court jury found it was substantially true to say he was a “charlatan who makes fraudulent medical claims”, preys on cancer patients, has an “indecent interest in girls as young as 10” who stayed unaccompanied

LEFT: Universal Medicine founder Serge Benhayon.

at his home, and persuaded followers to shun loved ones who would not join UM. The jury found Benhayon was at the helm of a “socially harmful cult”. Australian authorities subsequently banned him from treating children and demanded that the millionaire, who once persuaded a dying cancer patient to leave him £750,000, should pay legal costs to the blogger. Benhayon denied any wrongdoing and claimed to be a victim of a media witch-hunt. In the BBC *Inside Out West* report (broadcast on 11 March), Simon Williams claimed people “don't understand” what UM is about, and said the Australian court ruling was “totally untrue”, but when questioned about UM's beliefs about sexual assault and disabled people he refused to answer.

The Lighthouse is a B&B with 30 acres of woodland. Its centrepiece, an indoor swimming pool, is run by Benhayon's daughter Simone, who he claims is a reincarnation of Winston Churchill. Since the court ruling, two Church of England schools have stopped using the pool, and two others may follow suit. An unnamed neighbour of the Lighthouse said: “We try to have as little as possible to do with them [UM students]. They are all odd. Some say they are like zombies. I think they are more like robots – strangely disconnected from the real world. They give me the creeps.” *Sunday Times*, 10 Mar; *BBC News*, 10+13 Mar; *Times*, 14 Mar; *D.Mail*, 16 Mar 2019.



NATIONAL ELF SERVICE

Steamy sex with Iceland's *huldufólk*

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ELIXIR OF IMMORTALITY

Odd liquid found in 2,000-year-old Chinese pot

PAGE 16



HAUNTED FURNITURE

Chairs and beds that go bump in the night

PAGE 18

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The growth of an academic industry devoted to the study of conspiracy theory is evident in a spate of recent books on the subject. **NOEL ROONEY** asks if this is 'conspiracy theory theory'.

IN BLACK AND WHITE

In the last couple of years, there has been a significant increase in the number of books published about conspiracy theory; to the point where one might be forgiven for thinking that there are more books published *on* conspiracy theory than *of* conspiracy theory. A brief selection of the most recent titles: *Conspiracy Theories in American History (an Encyclopaedia)* by Peter Knight; *A Lot of People are Saying: the New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy*, by Nancy Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead; *American Conspiracy Theories*, by Joseph Uscinski and Joseph M Parent; *Republic of Liars*, by Anna Merlan; *Conspiracies of Conspiracies*, by Thomas Milan Konda. A good proportion of these books are by academics, reflecting the growing academic industry that has sprung up around the Conspirasphere. Cambridge University has a research team dedicated to the subject; others, such as Uscinski, have mined a lucrative seam in public consciousness with their books and articles. One might go so far as to say that a new academic discipline has been established, which, for want of a better name, we could characterise as conspiracy theory theory.

There are common themes among these recent books and some theoretical divisions. The divisions are largely based around an argument as to whether conspiracy theory (and at this point it's worth noting that there is no universally agreed definition of the term) is essentially a new phenomenon, or merely the continuation of a stream of thinking that is demonstrably over 200 years old and arguably much older. There is not enough space here to rehearse the argument fully; but briefly, it seems to rest on a perception that there is a classical version of CT that is concerned with explaining the world as it is by proposing an alternative evidence base, one where a grand conspiracy is fomented by a small, ultra-powerful cabal (membership varies,

naturally, but there are common threads: the Illuminati, Freemasons, Jews, the Knights Templar, the Vatican); and then there is a novel type of conspiracism that consists of throwing bizarre stories into the political and cultural mix, without explanation, and effectively waiting to see if people buy them.

I have a strong feeling that this 'new' phenomenon proposed by some is not conspiracy theory at all, precisely because it offers no explanation; explanation is, I think, central to the project of conspiracy theory, and is the glue that binds the – often exotically disparate – elements of the conspiracy narrative together. Stories such as Pizzagate do not attempt to explain the world as it is; they merely sling mud at arbitrary targets, and encourage like-minded others to join in. This is, at root, weaponised gossip and, while it may have public traction and a distorting effect on cultural and political processes, it has no underlying entelechy; it's not a theory, therefore it's not conspiracy theory.

The common theme in these recent publications is democracy, and whether conspiracy theory represents a threat to it. This particular vein of agonising is by no means new; the widespread use of the term 'conspiracy theory' is itself a product of fears that the 'paranoid style' of suspicious dissent could undermine the institutions of democracy. The term democracy is used extremely loosely and broadly among most of these writers and academics; they are actually talking about liberal democracy, and a particular Western model of liberal democracy. Not all conspiracy theorists are liberal democrats, of course (it's a hidden truism of conspiracy theory theory that the Conspirasphere is inhabited largely by right-wing, fascist, religious nutters); but most espouse some form of democracy and seek to defend it. More to the point, I'd suggest that defending something that isn't necessarily being attacked has, itself, more than a whiff of paranoid style about it.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

GIANT PANDA HELPS SELL HOUSE

Hull Daily Mail, 7 May 2016.

Knuckle duster accused in court

Hull Daily Mail, 29 Aug 2018.

STUDENT TEACHER TRIED TO SET FIRE TO HIS EX'S HOME TO WIN HER BACK

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Jan 2019.

Drowning mum jailed

Hull Daily Mail, 19 Mar 2019.

'NEIGHBOUR'S WASHING MACHINE HAS TURNED ME INTO A ZOMBIE'

Hull Daily Mail, 21 Mar 2019.

Dad's gun threat in heated school gates row

Hull Daily Mail, 24 Jan 2019.

'TESTING PUPILS ON TIMES TABLES DOESN'T ADD UP'

Hull Daily Mail, 14 Jan 2016.

HARE PIE AND BOTTLE KICKING

One of England's stranger Easter customs is the traditional Easter Monday 'Bottle Kicking' match, which takes place every year in Hallaton, Leicestershire. The event has two distinct parts; the first is the 'Hare Pie Scramble', in which said pie is blessed by the vicar before being cut up and thrown to the crowd, who scramble to get a piece. The

second part of the day – the 'Bottle Kicking' – sees competitors from the village of Hallaton take on their rivals from the neighbouring village of Medbourne in a mass ball game. Teams attempt to carry a 'bottle', in the form of a wooden keg of beer and get it – by any means necessary – across a boundary stream for their own village. Bottle kicking is a rough game, and

there are virtually no rules except that no eye-gouging, strangling, or weapons are permitted. The custom dates back to the 18th century but is believed by some to have far older origins in the pre-Christian era. This year's event, seen in these photos, took place on Monday 22 April. **PHOTOS: JACK TAYLOR/GETTY IMAGES and OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES**





SIDELINES...

GHOST CONTROL

A family's security cameras in Stockton, California, captured close neighbour Cuong Pham, 38, pouring diesel and then trying to set the porch on fire. A woman and her two children were sleeping inside at the time. Pham was arrested. "He said that he didn't have anything against us, that he thought he saw a ghost in our house and to me that's just even scarier," said the homeowner. *abc7chicago.com*, 9 Mar 2019.

GLOWING SQUIRRELS

Biologists in North Carolina have revealed that many of the State's fox squirrels have congenital erythropoietic porphyria, which causes their bones and sometimes even their fur to glow pink under ultraviolet light. The elusive critters can grow up to 26in (66cm) tall and weigh 6lb (2.7kg). They live in dense pine-oak forests near the coast. The purpose of fluorescent fur is unknown. *charlotteobserver.com*, 6 Feb; *Metro*, 14 Feb 2019.

BIZARRE FLY-TIP

In March, a 4ft (1.2m)-high pile of 400 red fire extinguishers were found dumped on Windy Hill, next to the M62 near Rochdale, Greater Manchester. Rochdale council was investigating. *D.Mirror*, 23 Mar 2019.

GERBIL SMUGGLER

Suspicious Taiwanese customs officials detained a female passenger because she was walking awkwardly through the airport. A body search of the 60-year-old revealed 24 gerbils strapped to her legs. She claimed the rodents were intended as gifts for her friends. *D.Mail*, 18 Jan 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

SEEING DOUBLE | Baseball confusion, bearded doppelgängers, twins behaving badly



ABOVE: Brady Feigl and Brady Feigl. BELOW: Neil Thomas Douglas (right) and his doppelgänger, Robert Stirling, met on a Ryanair flight from Stansted to Galway.

FEIGL VS FEIGL

Two baseball players are causing a major league confusion because of their names, their looks and everything else besides. Brady Feigl and Brady Feigl are both 6ft 4in (1.93m) tall, have red hair, matching beards and wear thick, black-rimmed glasses. Right-handed Brady Gregory Feigl is 22, was born in Missouri, and now plays for a Single-A affiliate of the Oakland Athletics. Left-handed Brady Matthew Feigl is 27, was born in Maryland, and plays on the Texas Rangers' Triple-A affiliate in Round Rock, Texas.

In fact, they do look slightly different when they're shaven, and the 22-year-old Feigl outweighs the elder by over 30lb (14kg). They learned about each other after the younger Feigl was mistaken for the older by the office of world-renowned orthopaedic surgeon Dr James Andrews, who operated on their elbows in 2015. There is no evidence that the two have ever met, although they naturally get confused for each other from time to time. *dailymail.co.uk*, 3 Sept 2018; *D.Mirror*, 23 Feb 2019.

BEARDS ON A PLANE

Neil Thomas Douglas, 32, boarded a Ryanair flight to Galway via London Stansted on 29 October 2015. "There was a dude already on my seat," said Mr Douglas, a photographer from Glasgow. "When the guy looked up, I thought: 'He looks like me'. Everyone around us had a laugh, we took a selfie and that was it." The selfie was posted on Twitter and was reposted thousands of times. The pair were later to encounter a further coincidence when they

checked into the same hotel in Galway, an hour's drive from Knock airport. Mr Douglas added: "Later that night, I went to the pub and again, there was my twin. Total weirdness. We had a laugh and a pint." The doppelgänger was Robert Stirling, 35, a civil servant from Redbridge, northeast London. *BBC News*, 30 Oct; *D.Mail*, 31 Oct 2015. For another striking pair of bearded doppelgängers, Neil Richardson and John Jemison, see FT327:11.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

A judge in Brazil has ordered identical twin brothers to both pay maintenance to a child, because they refused to say which one of them was the father, hoping to escape responsibility (a DNA test proved inconclusive). Each man will have to pay £45 a month, or 30 per cent of the minimum salary in Brazil. This means the girl will get twice as much as other children from the same economic background in Brazil. The judge also ruled that the names of both men would be on the girl's birth certificate. Their names were not disclosed for legal reasons; they were referred to in court as Fernando and Fabrício. The judge said they had used their resemblance to impersonate each other and date as many women as possible, and then defend themselves from allegations they were cheating on girlfriends. *BBC News*, 2 April; *Sun*, 4 April 2019.





NATIONAL ELF SERVICE | Sex, belief and road protests in Iceland



ABOVE: Elf activist Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir: "I work with elves and *huldufólk* as a translator and communicator between the worlds".
BELOW: Artist and photographer Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir has produced a book about "sex with the Icelandic invisibles".

An Icelandic artist has confessed to swiving with elves. Hallgerður Hallgrímsdóttir, who said she was an elf sex expert and has written a book called *Please YoursELF-Sex with the Icelandic Invisibles*. "Sex with humans is boring," she told a video interview with *Vice*. "Elves sort of know what you want in bed. They don't need to ask what you want, they can read your mind and maybe even know better what you want than you do which is very incredible [the Gang of Fort can but agree]. They are very flexible so can use positions which would not be possible as human beings... They can do stuff you would never imagine, and also have the imagination to think of things you never would."

Showing a book of elf sex positions, she said: "This is a picture of one of the crazy positions that an elf can do." In it the elf is bent over backwards, his head facing skywards. Of another, she said: "He's standing up and she's sort of up with her feet on his shoulders. He's performing oral sex on her. They have incredible tongues... With elves, size doesn't matter... Elf sperm is quite shimmery, glittery... You will definitely have an orgasm with an elf. I've

had loads of them." Hallgerður cannot tell how long these encounters last; bedded in soft moss with a supernatural being by her side (or some other position entirely) seems to blur the time space continuum.

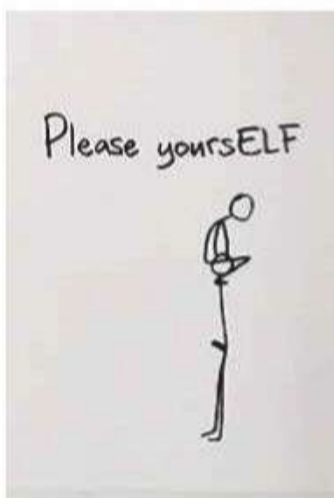
"Elf sex is possibly the safest sex on earth," writes Hallgerður in her blog. "They don't carry sexually transmitted diseases and you can't get pregnant or make an elverine pregnant unless you both want to, which is not unheard of. And yes there are female elves, elverines. And they're *hot hot hot*, even to girls. That reminds me: all elves are bisexual, but guys and girls not ready for some same sex action don't worry, no elf will do anything you don't want to. They can sense your longings and not-longings."

Surveys have shown that 10 per cent of Icelanders believe in the existence of *huldufólk* (the hidden people): dwarfs, spirits and other supernatural beings. Ten per cent deny it, but the remaining 80 per cent

still refuse to rule out their existence. The word *Alfar*, or elf, first appeared in Icelandic literature around AD 1000. In 2013, *The Atlantic* reported how plans to build a road through a lava field near Reykjavík had caused problems, not just for environmental reasons. One protester, Ragnhildur Jónsdóttir, was worried the road would upset an elf colony. "This elf

church is connected by light energy to other churches, other places," she said. "So, if one of them is destroyed, it's, uh, well, it's not a good thing." Meanwhile, a *National Geographic* article suggested 54 per cent of Icelandic people believed that elves existed, although

descriptions of what they looked like varied from effectively like humans to "36 inches high at most". For more on Icelandic *huldufólk*, see "The land of the hidden people" by Claire Smith [FT201:42-47] and "Elfin safety concerns" [FT311:14]. *vice.com*, 1 Feb 2009; *grapevine.is*, 15 Aug; *Sun*, via *kidspot.com.au*, 7 Dec 2018.



SIDELINES...

'CRUSADER' DECAPITATED

Gardaí recovered the head of an 800-year-old mummy, known as "the Crusader", along with a second skull, both of which were stolen from a crypt in St Michan's Church in Dublin on the weekend of 23/25 February. They were found in a bag, left in church grounds. 'The Crusader' is so-called because his legs are broken and crossed. The crypt had been vandalised before, in 1996 [FT100:14]. *Irish Times*, 26 Feb, 6 Mar; *Church Times*, 8 Mar 2019.

HANDSOME RETURN

Debra Goddard of Twickenham, west London, paid £10 for a "glass" ring in a car boot sale when she was 22. After keeping it in a box for 33 years, she took it to a jeweller. The "glass" was a 26.27 carat diamond, the ring made £740,000 at auction and Debra took home £470,000 after auction costs. *Sun*, 3 Feb 2019.

SIMIAN MYSTERY

The corpse of a monkey, believed to be a black-tufted marmoset, was found in Wren Close, Edmonton, east London, in mid-December. It had suffered severe trauma to its head and part of its face was missing. *D.Telegraph*, 20 Dec 2018.

TROJAN BEETLE

London's Royal Academy may have accidentally imported deadly Asian long-horn beetles into Britain when it took possession of noted artist Ai Weiwei's wooden sculpture *Tree*, installing it in the RA's courtyard in 2015. The sculpture was constructed from dead trees taken from the mountains of southern China, and sold in Jiangxi province where the beetles are rife. The RA was forced to close the display while the exhibit was fumigated, but it is believed the beetles escaped long before, as they have subsequently been discovered in many pieces of UK furniture. *D.Telegraph*, 10 Nov 2018.

WINDMILLS?

Katherine Berry, 44, of Barrow, Cumbria, scared her lover's wife by covertly planting children's windmills in her garden for months. She began her surreal harassment after the husband, with whom she had a four-year fling, decided to stay married. Berry was ordered to do 140 hours of unpaid work. *Metro*, 17 Jan 2019.



SIDELINES...

ALTERNATIVE FACT

Almost six in 10 *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) protesters in France believe that Princess Diana was assassinated, according to a poll of 1,506 people conducted for the Jean-Jaurès Foundation and Conspiracy Watch from 21 to 23 December 2018. *D.Telegraph*, 12 Feb 2019.

THIRSTY PYTHON, LURKING DANGER

59-year-old Helen Richards got an unpleasant surprise in her Brisbane home, when a 5ft (1.5m) carpet python lurking in her toilet bowl bit her bottom. It is believed that unusually dry weather in eastern Australia has caused snakes to seek water in unusual places. *Times*, 29 Jan 2019

BIRTH OF BUBBLY

Champagne chief Pierre-Emmanuel Taittinger has ceded the invention of bubbly to the British, who left cheap wine imports in cold conditions on the London docks, causing them to re-ferment and self-carbonate. Drinkers gradually became accustomed to the sparkling tippie – which was first mentioned in Samuel Butler's 1663 poem *Hudibras*. Taittinger is effervescent about the British influence on the worldwide beverage market. "They invented the consumption of champagne, as well as clarets from Bordeaux, burgundy, cognac; in short, everything that's made the reputation of France in the world," he said. *D.Telegraph*, 31 Jan 2019.

LYING DUTCHMAN

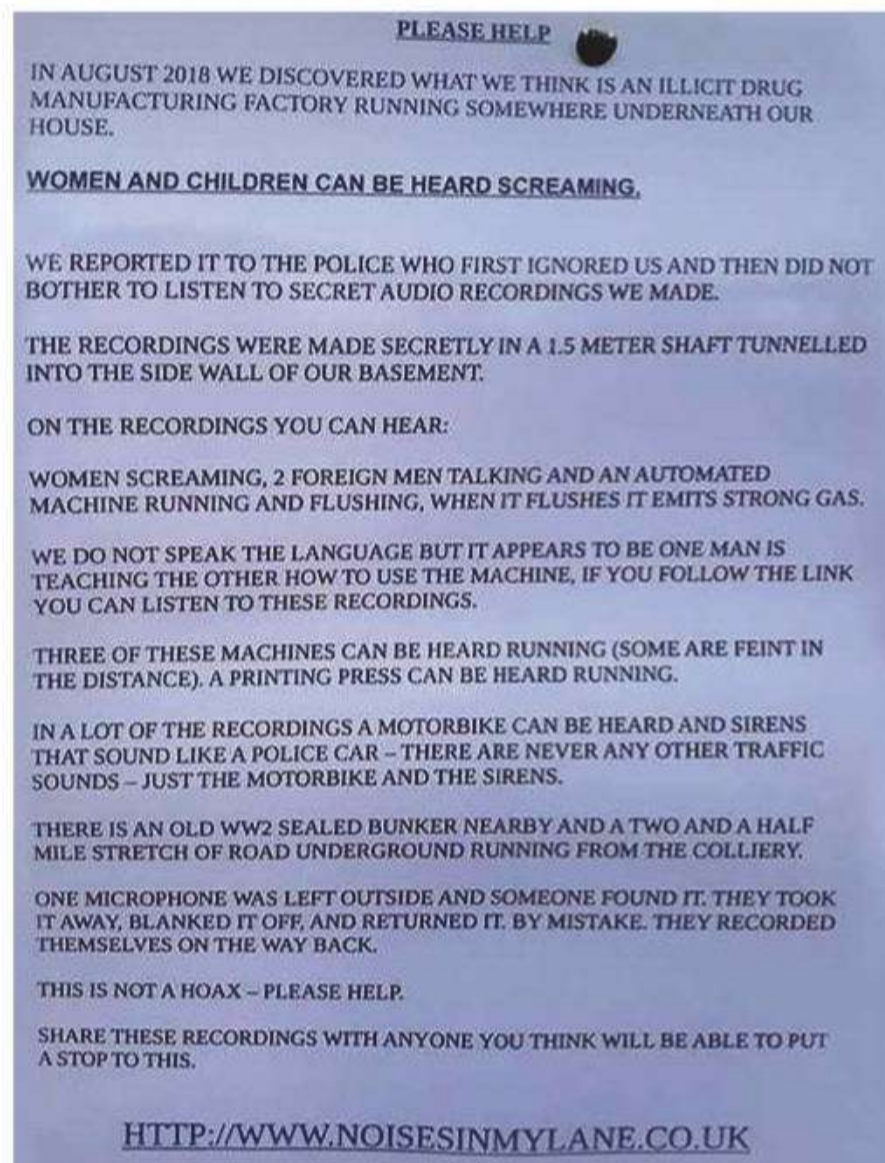
Dutch authorities have warned the public after a man from Venlo discovered a ticking World War II bomb in his garden, and attempted to smother the device by sprawling upon it for three hours. Authorities confirmed it was harmless and issued a reminder that it was "strictly ill-advised to lie down on a bomb". (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 12 Jan 2019.



MARTIN ROSS

PHANTOM MENACE

Couple flee home after becoming alarmed by mysterious sounds



ABOVE: One of the strange posters put up in Gloucestershire this April.

BELOW: The van in which Alan and Christine Tait are now apparently living.

In April, bizarre posters were stuck to lampposts and pushed through letterboxes in Gloucester, Cheltenham, Lydney and numerous other parts of Gloucestershire. These read:

"PLEASE HELP. In August 2018 we discovered what we think is an illicit drug manufacturing factory running somewhere underneath our house. Women and children can be heard screaming. We reported it to the police who first ignored us and then did not bother to listen to secret audio recordings we made. The recordings were made secretly in a 1.5 metre shaft tunnelled into the side of our basement. On the recordings you can hear: Women screaming, two foreign men talking and an automated machine running and flushing, when it flushes it emits strong gas. We do not speak the language but it appears to be one man is teaching the other

"If I had one of these posters through my door, I'd think it was a hoax too."



how to use the machine, if you follow the link you can listen to these recordings. Three of these machines can be heard running (some are faint in the distance). A printing press can be heard running. In a lot of the recordings a motorbike can be heard and sirens that sound like a police car – there are never any other traffic sounds – just the motorbike and the sirens. There is an old WW2 sealed bunker nearby and a two-and-a-half mile stretch of road underground running from the colliery. One microphone was left outside and someone found it. They took it away, blanked it off, and returned it. By mistake, they recorded themselves on the way back. This is not a hoax – please help. Share these recordings with anyone you think will be able to put a stop to this." The poster then carries a link to a website: www.noisesinmylane.co.uk. There is no mention of any location on either poster or website, although the 'contact' page on the site shows pictures of a blue van apparently parked off St Oswald's Road in Gloucester.

Gloucestershire Live discovered that the posters are the work of husband and wife Alan and Christine Tait. The recordings were made in their home in Ammanford, South Wales, and the noises picked up were coming from beneath a neighbouring property in the town centre, which is part-commercial, part-residential. They said that they found a "sticky residue" in a drain shaft



linked to the neighbouring property and that they've become so ill from exposure to this substance that they can no longer live there. They had made numerous reports to Dyfed Powys Police, but feel their claims were not taken seriously. They now lead a nomadic existence in a van, travelling from area to area to put up their posters in a bid to find someone "who will take us seriously and help us". They have given up their livelihood, which revolved around selling stock retrieved from liquidated businesses. They have now left Gloucestershire, but "aren't far away" and don't have a set route for their ongoing journey.

"I know how desperate it looks," said Mrs Tait. "If I had one of those posters through my door I would think it's a hoax too. But we're not mad, and we are desperate. People have said they think we're senile but we're really not. No one will investigate, no one will take us seriously." Her husband said: "When we released all the information to Dyfed Powys Police they did nothing at all. They still did not listen to the recordings... They began their investigation by phoning the owners of the house next door to ask for an appointment to come and look inside the property... The police say they did not find anything in the house and the house was completely empty." *gloucestershirelive.co.uk, 12 April 2019.*

- An equally puzzling story, this one from the 19th century, was related recently by Eugene Byrne, sometime *FT* columnist (1994-95), in the *Western Daily Press* (30 Oct 2018). Thomas Bowser Cumpston, 26, a well-to-do Yorkshire linen merchant, and Ann Martha Cumpston, 23, his wife of a few months, booked into the Victoria Hotel, Bristol, on 8 December 1873, intending to travel to Weston-super-Mare the next day. They went to bed around midnight. Mrs Tongue, the hotel landlady, said she was disturbed by a noise in the Cumpstons' room at around 1am, but thought nothing of it and everything was soon quiet again. At around 4am, she was awoken by loud screams and shouts of



ABOVE: The Victoria Hotel in Bristol, the scene of a puzzling story from 1873.

"Murder!" and then by gunshots. From her room at the top of the building she went downstairs to investigate and heard Mrs Cumpston shout, "Keep that knife from me!" While Mrs Tongue rushed to the front door to yell for help, the Cumpstons, leaving their luggage behind, jumped out of their bedroom window into the yard below, a drop of 12ft (3.6m) onto hard flagstones. Remarkably, neither was injured. They rushed into the street and towards Temple Meads railway station, shouting "Help!" and "Murder!" at the dozing booking office clerk. The latter ran to the office of Thomas Hawker, the station's night superintendent, who intercepted the couple crossing the railway lines and tried to calm them down. He took them to the parcels office where there was a warm fire. They told Hawker they had just been "in one of the worst houses they were ever in in their lives, amongst a lot of thieves and rogues and had had to defend themselves." Two policemen arrived and confiscated a revolver and three knives from Mr Cumpston.

The episode became stranger still with Mr Cumpston's testimony in Bristol Police Court on 13 December. At about 1am, he said, they "had become annoyed by a disagreeable row," which they couldn't explain. "The bed was a peculiar one," he said. "It opened and did all sorts of strange things. And the floor opened." They heard voices, and jumped out of the window. Annie Cumpston said they heard strange noises at about 1am, but the landlady came and

reassured them, and they went back to bed. At around three or four o'clock they heard worse noises but had no idea what they were. The floor seemed to be giving way, and the bed seemed to open. They heard voices, and what they said was repeated back to them. The floor seemed to open, and her husband fell down some distance, and she tried to get him up. "I heard sounds of whispering," she said. "And a repetition of our own conversation. I could hear somebody at the time I spoke, and could hear the floor shake." She told her husband to fire his pistol to frighten away whoever or whatever was threatening them, so he shot it at the ceiling. Then they leapt out of the window. She added that, contrary to Mrs Tongue's testimony, she never said, "Keep that knife away from me!" The couple were released into the care of a family friend, Harley Butt of Gloucester. They lived the rest of their lives in fairly prosperous obscurity. Thomas died in 1893 leaving his wife well over £4,000, and Annie lived on until 1935.

The case caught the attention of Charles Fort, who wrongly described the Cumpstons as "an elderly couple" (*Lo!* chapter 18). The police at the time had attributed the episode to "collective hallucination", seconded by the contemporary newspaper reports, but Fort describes this as "another of the dismissal-labels by which conventionalists shirk thinking". He commented: "The loud sounds in the Cumpston case suggest something of correlation with poltergeist phenomena."

SIDELINES...

SHED SLAVE

A 58-year-old man was rescued from a shed on a travellers' site where he had lived for the past 40 years. A 79-year-old man living in an adjacent mobile home was arrested on slavery charges. The unheated two metre square (6.5ft x 6.5ft) shed contained a chair, a TV, and cardboard to sleep on. "He used to do odd jobs for the older man and his family and was pretty happy", a site staff member said. "He seems to have had learning difficulties". *Sun, 4 Oct 2018.*

INCY WINCY

A police unit was despatched to a house in Wanneroo, Western Australia, after worried neighbours reported hearing a screaming child and a man's voice repeatedly shouting, "Why don't you die?" Officers found no sign of violence and the embarrassed father told police that he had been trying to kill a spider. *Guardian online, 2 Jan 2019.*

HEADLESS SEAL MYSTERY

A New Zealand ranger found the headless bodies of six year-old seal pups at Scenery Nook, near Christchurch. A spokesman for the local conservation department suggested that the pups, although protected by law, were killed and decapitated by anglers who had a "misplaced belief" that seals are competing with them for fish. *D.Telegraph, 20 Dec 2018*

REFLECTING ON DISASTER

Titanic Captain Edward Smith's dressing table mirror, kept at his home in Stoke, Staffordshire, was put up for auction in December. Housemaid Ethelwynne, who inherited the mirror, reported seeing her former employer's likeness in the glass every April, on the anniversary of the ship's sinking. *Sun, 9 Nov 2018.*



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

SEALS OF DISAPPROVAL

50 hostile seals forced a would-be fisherman up a cliff face in Eyemouth, on the Scottish Borders. The victim, who had been taking a midnight stroll along the beach, was eventually rescued by the RNLI. "Aggressive seals are not a common occurrence", said senior coastguard Jonathan Mustard. "They may have been protecting or defending their young". *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 Nov 2018.

ADORNED BIRD MYSTERY

A number of sparrows and pigeons have been found in New Zealand with decorative trinkets attached to them. The Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reported that the birds were "incredibly distressed" and that some had died of starvation due to an inability to fly, encumbered by the decorations. Others were in such poor condition that they had to be euthanised. *Guardian*, 10 Jan 2019.

CUT IT OUT

A cardboard likeness of police chief Andrew Smith, designed to deter shoplifters, was unexpectedly stolen from the Kwik Trip store in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Asked how it felt to be pilfered, Smith said: "I figure the cutout is posted at a shooting range somewhere", adding that "retail theft is down 5 per cent this year, so maybe I get the last laugh". *Green Bay (WI) Press-Gazette*, 17 Dec 2018.

SIGHT FOR SORE EYES

Customers and staff of an optician's in Hennebont, Brittany, were surprised to see an alpaca stroll into their shop, where it remained for some time, apparently relaxed and unruffled. Authorities traced the owner, who removed the llama-like pet without making a purchase. *D.Express*, 25 Jan 2019.

TANGERINE DREAM

Orange snow fell in Russia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Romania and Moldova after mixing with sand from the Sahara desert, creating a Martian-like landscape for winter sports enthusiasts. The phenomenon occurs roughly once every five years, but on this occasion the snow was especially colourful. Snowboarders and skiers complained that they were swallowing sand. *BBC News*, 25 Mar 2018.

FIGURE IN THE FLAMES | Jesus appears at Notre-Dame, saves bees?



CHESNOT / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: The roof of Notre-Dame in flames. Lesley Rowan spotted a Christ-like figure among the burning scaffolding.

BELOW: Beehives on the cathedral's roof; fortunately, the smoke from the fire sedated rather than killed the 180,000 bees.

On 15 April, a fire broke out in Paris's great mediæval cathedral of Notre-Dame; the blaze spread rapidly, causing the steeple to collapse and destroying most of the roof. The catastrophic fire, believed to have broken out accidentally during renovation work, was brought under control by the city's firefighters and much of the fabric of the church saved.

The world had watched in horror as the Gothic masterpiece was engulfed in flames, but one woman thought she spied a divine figure in the inferno. Lesley Rowan, from Alexandria in West Dunbartonshire, Scotland, was reading about the fire when she noticed what looked like the figure of Jesus Christ in one of the pictures, emerging from the billowing smoke and flames. Posting the photo on her Facebook page, she said: "I may be letting my mind play tricks on me here, folks take a close look at this picture and what do you see?"

The 38-year-old told the *Daily Record*: "I feel like it will bring comfort to people in Paris and all over the world at this sad time."



NOTRE DAME / TWITTER

She received plenty of responses from social media users, some agreeing that a Jesus-like figure was clearly visible, others suggesting that that was a case of pareidolia (though not, for the most part, in such polite terms).

If the Son of God did appear, he seems to have kept an eye out for the cathedral's smallest residents. Some 180,000 bees living in hives on the roof were initially thought to have perished in the blaze, but it was later confirmed by Nicolas Géant,

the cathedral's beekeeper, that the Notre-Dame bees were alive and buzzing. Mr Géant said the carbon dioxide in the fire's heavy smoke had put the bees into a sedated state rather than killing them. The three beehives were installed in 2013 as part of an initiative to boost bee numbers across Paris. The hives sit on top of the sacristy, around 30m (98ft) below the main roof. As a result they were untouched by the flames. *D. Record*, *D. Mail*, 16 April; *BBC News*, 20 April 2019.

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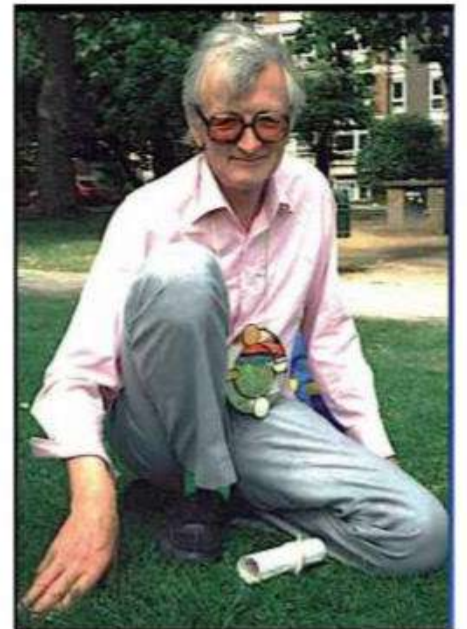
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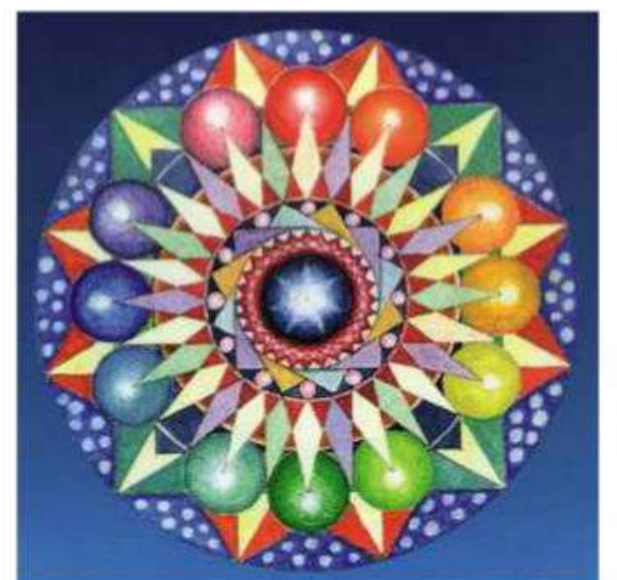
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A hidden world of colours

DAVID HAMBLING reports on the latest attempt to see beyond the visible spectrum: mouse-o-vision

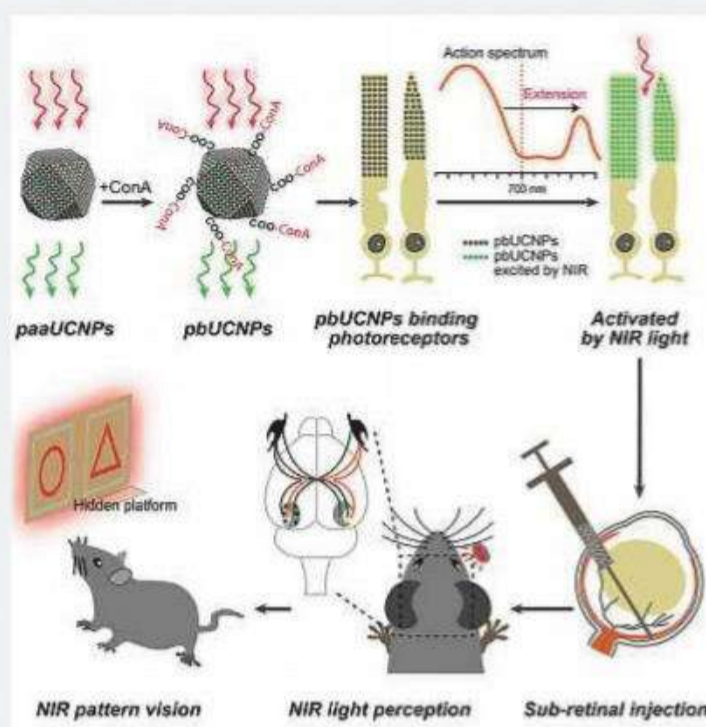
New technology promises to open up a new world and reveal colours previously hidden from human eyes off the end of the spectrum.

In 1800 the astronomer Sir William Herschel discovered something seemingly paradoxical: invisible light. Herschel was interested in the relationship between light and heat, and he passed sunlight through a prism to split it into its component colours. When he measured the temperature that each colour produced on a thermometer, he was surprised to find that there was a strong heating effect just beyond red. He had discovered that as well as visible light, sunlight also includes rays invisible to us below the red-end of the spectrum – infrared. A year later, German chemist Johann Ritter discovered ultraviolet by its effect on silver chloride.

These discoveries hinted at a hidden world of colours inaccessible to us. The invisible world was explored with cameras fitted with special lenses and filters. Ultraviolet photography revealed marks showing documents had been tampered with; it can also show scars invisible to the naked eye and was used for forensics as far back as the 1930s. Infrared light penetrates haze better than visible light, and infrared cameras proved valuable for aerial photography. (At much longer wavelengths, objects become visible from the heat they produce, which is the basis for thermal imaging, but this requires far more advanced equipment).

A variety of animals, especially insects, see further into the violet end of the range than we do. Flowers which look plain to us may have vivid patterns when seen in the ultraviolet. Some birds of prey, such as kestrels, appeared to have UV vision, and it was suggested that this allows them to spot prey such as voles, which leave an ultraviolet-reflecting trail of urine – but later research suggests this may not be the case. Reindeer definitely can see in the ultraviolet, helping them find lichen, which shows up black against white snow in the UV range.

The human retina is sensitive to ultraviolet light, but it is blocked by the lens in the eye, which is opaque in this range. Some patients who have had a lens removed due to cataracts – and replaced with an artificial lens that allows UV through – can see into this range. Professor Bill Stark of Saint Louis University has investigated this area, and has the advantage of having had one lens removed



LEFT: A graphic showing how injectable photoreceptor-binding particles with the ability to convert photons from low-energy to high-energy forms allow mice to develop infrared vision.

A2 but has no A1, participants would gain the ability to see into the infrared. Science for the Masses claimed that an electroretinogram indicated that the participants were able to detect flashes of infrared light. This claim was challenged by neuroscientist Bryan Jones of the University of Utah, who does not accept the premise that photopigments can be engineered in this way. There remains some doubt over the project.

Meanwhile, a team of American and Chinese scientists has developed a form of infravision that

is less controversial, injecting special nanoparticles into the eyes of mice. These particles are engineered to convert any infrared light striking them into green, a bit like the dyes in high-vis clothing, which convert invisible UV into a visible glow.

There was no direct way to check what the mice could see, but after the injections they preferred to sleep in a completely dark box rather than one illuminated with infrared light. This suggests that they were aware of the infrared. The research, published in the journal *Cell* in February 2019, claims the injections were harmless and did not affect the mice's daylight vision. The researchers believe that the nanoparticles will remain in place for about two months.

"This technique works as a stealthy, self-powered and near infrared-visible light compatible night vision device," state the researchers. This is rather overstating the achievement. Because it only provides near-infrared vision, this technique makes things visible only if they are lit up by an external IR light source. Given that it requires external hardware, it would be simpler to get some thermal imaging goggles, which are more effective and see further into the infrared.

The quest to see beyond the visible continues. There is little need to modify eyeballs though, given that most of us now carry the necessary technology around with us. To see outside the spectrum, simply point your smartphone camera at a TV remote control. These emit infrared that is invisible to the human eye, but shows up nicely on digital imaging.

so he can see UV himself. Stark's work on colour matching shows UV is perceived as a 'whitish violet'. In 1923, when he was 82, the artist Claude Monet had his left lens removed due to a cataract. Monet continued to paint, and his pictures indicate he may have been seeing some ultraviolet: water-lily flowers, which look white to normal eyes, are a bluish-white in Monet's later works.

While gaining ultravision is relatively simple, infrared vision is more of a challenge. The problem is that the human retina is simply not sensitive to infrared light – normally. An exception was found in 2014, when researchers at Washington University School of Medicine reported seeing flashes of green light while working with an infrared laser. This only occurred when they were firing very short pulses in quick succession. It turns out that if there are two infrared pulses in a row, the light-sensitive photopigment can absorb two photons of light. This is enough to produce a reaction and a visible effect.

There may be other ways to see infrared. In 2014 Science for the Masses, self-proclaimed biohackers keen on challenging the limits of human biology, attempted a "human near-infrared project" based purely on a change of diet. The photopigment which gives the human retina its light-sensitivity is based on Vitamin A1. Some animals, notably zebra fish and bullfrogs, have photopigments based in Vitamin A2, which provides sensitivity well into the near-infrared range. Humans can use A2, but A1 is taken up by preference. The theory was that by eating a diet that is rich in Vitamin



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PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries

ELIXIR OF LIFE FOUND (APPARENTLY)

A strange liquid was discovered late in 2018, undisturbed inside a 2,000-year-old bronze pot found in a large tomb dating back to the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 8) in Luoyan, Henan Province, China. The 3.5 litres of liquid are a transparent yellow and smell like a rich wine. Indeed, the archaeologists initially assumed it was a rice wine – until they decanted some of it from the bronze pot and had it analysed. The results revealed that the mysterious liquid is, in fact, a curious mixture of potassium nitrate (today used for fireworks, fertiliser, etc.) and alunite (a hydrous sulphate of potassium and aluminium). It then transpired that this formula matches the ingredients of an ‘elixir of life’ documented in ancient Taoist texts. In old China, a ‘drink of immortality’ was assiduously sought, and all kinds of concoctions were touted as elixirs. It’s not known if anyone actually drank any of this newly-found potion, but being found in a tomb, plus the fact that potassium nitrate in sufficient quantities can be fatal, does not say much for its supposed life-extending properties. *ScienceAlert*, 5 Mar 2019.

SNAKE CHARMER

Archaeologists sifting through 1,500-year-old samples of human coprolites (partly fossilised turds) that had been collected from Conejo Shelter – a now flooded archaeological site close to the Mexican border in the Lower Pecos region of Texas – were amazed if not a little shocked to find parts of a digested rattlesnake in the fecal matter. It had been eaten raw, as had other items like a rodent eaten whole and unskinned. The turd samples would presumably have been left by a group of ancestral Pueblo Indians – hunter-gatherers who had existed in the region for thousands of years. It has not been determined whether the people in the shelter were jolly hungry or, possibly, that the snake was consumed as part of some kind of ritual activity. *Various sources*, 24 April 2019.



ABOVE: The 2,000-year-old pot and its liquid contents. BELOW: Hominin skulls over a 4.4-million year span.

FACE TO FACE

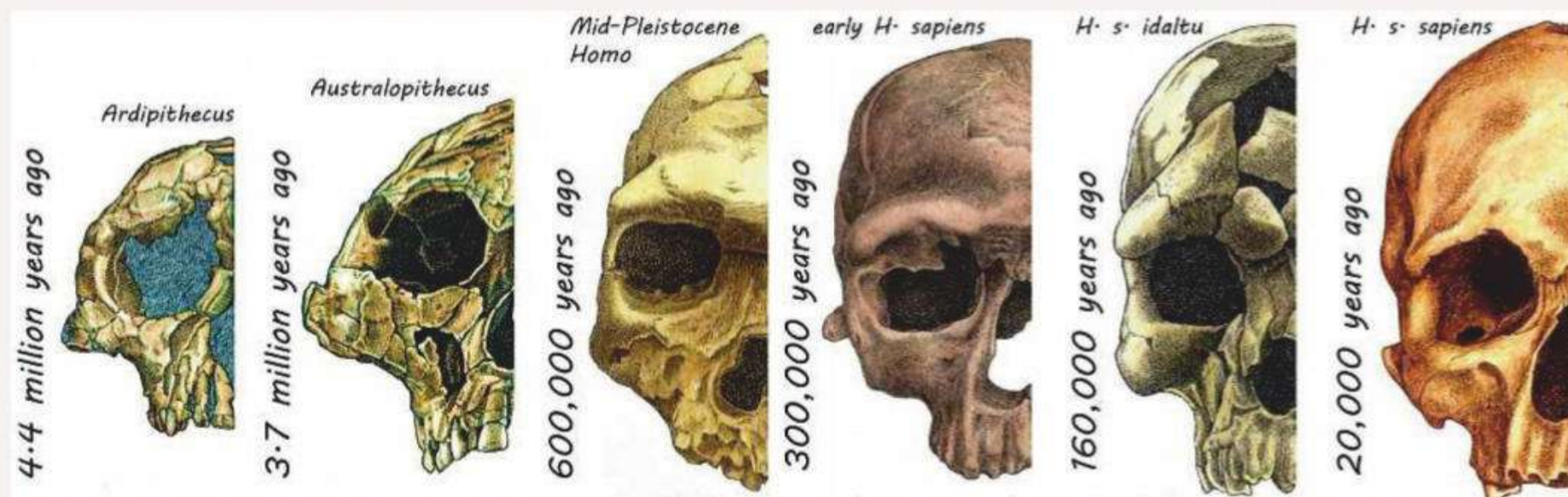
Our modern faces have evolved so that we now look markedly different from our human forebears. Reasons for this include diet and climate conditions, and that cooking food means we do not now need the same facial musculature for chewing. Also changes in respiratory physiology have had their effect. But an international team of researchers that has been tracing the evolution of the face think there is a largely overlooked other factor – the evolving need for more complex and subtle social skills including gesture and non-verbal communication. The heavy brow ridge of early hominins has been replaced by a smoother forehead, prominent hairy eyebrows allowing for a range of expressions, and our faces are slenderer.

“We can now use our faces to signal more than 20 different categories of emotion via the contraction or relaxation of muscles”, says one of the researchers, Professor Paul O’Higgins, archaeologist at Hull York Medical

School and the University of York. “It’s unlikely that our early human ancestors had the same facial dexterity as the overall shape of the face and the positions of the muscles were different.” *EurekAlert April 2019, from an original paper in Nature Ecology and Evolution.*

CHINESE PUZZLE

Another Chinese archaeological discovery, this time in Guangzhou Province, is a 13,500-year-old burial of a headless teenage girl at the site of the Qingtang ruins. She had been deliberately placed into a squatting position. Researchers are still trying to figure out whether the head was missing due to natural causes, or whether it was removed. Burials containing human remains arranged in a squatting posture have also been found elsewhere in southern China and southeast Asia, but the posture symbolism has not as yet been fathomed. Dare we say that we currently know jack squat about it...? *Archaeology*, 18 April 2019.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

236: BURNING ISSUES

The Notre Dame tragedy – why couldn't it have happened to a modern cathedral such as Trump Tower? – occasions no levity. As usual, though, it allows comparison with classical catastrophes. One salient point is rarely made. When ancient buildings burned, there were no gas mains to explode or electrical fittings to worsen conflagrations.

Palaces, Temples, and public buildings were usually constructed from marble, also limestone – and with the Romans, concrete. These do not burn as such, but gradually crumble under intense heat – see Michelle Tsai, 'Are Ancient Ruins Flammable?' (online)

Of course, there were disasters other than fires. Two examples from opposite ends of the ancient spectrum. The Colossus of Rhodes (one of the Seven ancient Wonders, though it did *not* bstride the harbour, despite Shakespeare and many others) was destroyed by earthquake in 226 BC. The many modern promises to rebuild it have (as yet) never been fulfilled. The Dome of Justinian's pride and joy, Hagia Sophia cathedral in Constantinople/Istanbul, several times collapsed from seismic irruptions (AD 553, 557, 558, 869, 969, 1341) and was not stabilised until 1847-9.

No doubt Parisian police's first thought was terrorism. There was once such a notorious case in Greek history. In 356 BC (one tradition puts this on the birthday of Alexander the Great), the Temple of Artemis was destroyed by a low-life arsonist, Herostratus, who boasted he did it to achieve immortal fame – foreshadowing Mark David Chapman's motive for murdering John Lennon. To thwart his perverted desire, the Ephesian authorities, after executing him, made it a capital offence to mention his name. But, since it is mentioned in various Greek and Roman sources, this failed.

Early Roman Christians may also fall into the terrorist category, if you believe JH Bishop, *Nero: The Man and the Legend* (1964) – I heard him expound this theory in a talk when we were colleagues in Australia. Bishop held that when the Great Fire of Rome broke out in AD 64 (details below), resident Christians believed this was God's work and so helped it on by spreading the blaze. According to Tacitus, many were arrested and confessed (under torture,



of course), thus justifying Nero's sadistic persecution (*Quo Vadis?* and so on).

One prized object saved from Notre Dame was the supposed Crown of Thorns worn by Christ at his Crucifixion. This had found its way to Paris courtesy of King Baldwin I of Jerusalem – I'd quite like to establish a family connection, but no genealogical luck – who in 1238 had flogged it off to Louis IX of France, famously a sucker for 'holy relics', at a vast price. The previous year, Baldwin had pawned a bit of 'The True Cross' – enough splinters survive to build a battleship, giped Martin Luther. Predecessor Baldwin I went several ones better by acquiring Christ's prepuce [see FT44:8] during the First Crusade – at least 18 churches and monasteries lay claim to this precious foreskin – and sending it on to Antwerp. Whilst glancing at related websites, I noticed one that had someone advertising fragments of the Crown of Thorns on E-Bay – can't be long before you can buy them in bulk on Amazon.

Fires at Rome and elsewhere were predictably common. Not just under 'bad' emperors; there was a serious one in AD 80, when the 'good' Titus reigned. Constantinople was ablaze in AD 406 and again in 532 thanks to the 'Nike' (Victory, not brand of trainers) Riots caused by the city's sports hooligans. Rome's first-ever fire brigade was the brainchild of Crassus. He formed a battalion of 500 pompieri who rushed to any fire, but did nothing whilst Crassus bargained with distraught property-owners for his price. No agreement meant no help. When the structure was destroyed, Crassus bought it at knockdown price. By such means did he become Rome's richest man and a political powerhouse – obvious role model for the

likes of Trump and Berlusconi...

Augustus improved the system by creating a public force of Vigiles, nicknamed 'Little Bucket Men'. Ironically, given the claim he ordered the burning of Rome – Suetonius was sure he had, Tacitus hesitated over incendiarism or accident, Nero consolidated the organisation of the Vigiles and improved their equipment and its efficiency. After the conflagration, Nero also introduced new regulations designed to guard against future fires. One thing is certain. Nero did *not* fiddle while Rome burned.

Tacitus (Annals, bk15 chs38-41) – himself around eight years old at the time – gives a detailed account: of the city's 14 districts, three were levelled, seven in charred ruins, only four intact – compare roughly New Orleans after Katrina. His enumeration of the many temples destroyed include that of Vesta. This edifice was many times destroyed, many times rebuilt over the centuries. Since it contained Vesta's (name survives in Swan Vesta matches) eternally-burning flame (to ensure Rome's wellbeing), a distinct flammable threat is discernible – only needed one careless or sleepy Vestal Virgin and...

The classical temple equivalent in pious and sentimental affection to Notre Dame was the Parthenon. As with the French cathedral, its roof and much of the interior were destroyed by fire in the third century AD, and further damaged by marauding Gallic attackers in 276.

Repairs were suitably enacted by last non-Christian emperor Julian, after which it lasted a good 1,000 years, first being converted into a Christian church, then a mosque.

September 26, 1687 marks a cultural divide between the ancient and modern worlds. On that day, a Venetian mortar hit the Parthenon, which the Turks were using as a gunpowder arsenal. The explosion wrought tremendous damage to roof, interior, and columns, with multiple fatalities and widespread house-destroying fires. *Bükemedigin bilegi öpeceksin* – Turkish denoting complete idiots. First reports from Notre Dame suggest the fire was caused either by an electrical fault (impossible in antiquity) or human error in the spire's restoration work.

Monumental moments, all...



Beds that go bump in the night

ALAN MURDIE goes in search of the world's most haunted items of furniture

Recently staff at a branch of the not-for-profit organisation Habitat for Humanity in the USA faced an unusual problem. One of their thrift stores, based at Rowan County, North Carolina, received a donation of heavy wooden furniture, donated with the aim of helping families worldwide create better homes for themselves. The problem with this particular donation, a chest of drawers and a canopy bed, was the donor telling them the pieces were haunted. The owner revealed that from the time of purchase, some years before, he and his wife had suffered "continuous nightmares" at their home. Additionally, after installing the furniture items, "the dogs wouldn't quit barking" and finally, on the seventh night in their home, he reported having "a lot of trouble waking his wife up."

Such statements would hardly be sufficient for concluding that a ghost must be on the loose, but these admissions placed the charitably inclined staff at Habitat for Humanity Rowan County Restore in an ethical dilemma. In media interviews Store Operations Director Elizabeth Brady stated that in 13 years, "this is the very first donation I'm aware of that's had that claim. We don't say we believe in ghosts or don't, but I have trouble selling this to someone not disclosing that. I would want to know as a customer."

As their business pursues the humanitarian goal of raising money for those in need, they were obliged to accept this donation for subsequent re-sale at the best price possible. But at the same time, as a Christian-orientated organisation, if the tall-boy and bed really were haunted, they didn't want to expose potential purchasers to spiritual hazards. Selling goods that might trigger ghostly manifestations would hardly be consistent with their goal of making a positive contribution to the lives of others.

In a notoriously litigious society such as the USA, that might well be a factor to be considered, albeit as a potentially novel ground in consumer rights and product liability. Accordingly, the items were exposed for sale with a warning notice pasted on them advising prospective customers: "Please note, previous owner reports that the highboy is haunted. He reports continuous nightmares for he and his wife



LEFT: The reportedly haunted bed and chest on sale for \$1,000 at a Habitat for Humanity store in Rowan County, North Carolina.

donor of the furniture to Habitat for Humanity, there is no way of ultimately proving what caused the nightmares or his dog to bark. To imply some psychometric influence whereby individual objects carry psychic impressions has appeal as a hypothesis, but thorough experiments with haunted objects have yet to be carried out. Unless better attested reports are obtained or specimens made available for testing, all will remain in the realm of speculation as to whether the reported phenomena originate purely within the mind of witnesses or attach more generally to the premises in which the items are

situated.

Touching an antique or genuinely historic object can often convey a vivid mental image and stimulate the imagination, but in this case the items date only from the 1950s, a comparatively recent vintage among occasional specimens of haunted furniture which have been publicised since the end of World War II.

Such haunted furniture stories are curiously appropriate for our modern age. At one time, supernatural horrors and terrors lurked in dark woods and forests. Now, with so many of our primæval forests felled and our urban population disconnected from woodlands, ghost stories emerge from the mass-produced final products of the sawmill and industrialised carpentry.

Haunted items of furniture represent a cult of supernatural relics, geared for consumer culture, providing intriguing stories for mass media dominated by advertising. The idea that furniture can be haunted rests upon the still popular belief that not only houses but also particular objects can become possessed or imbued by spirits or psychic forces. Chairs, especially rocking chairs and beds, feature particularly in such accounts.

In 2009, claims of a haunted chair provided for the President of Ghana prompted the appointment of a parliamentary committee to investigate (see *A Brief Guide to the Supernatural* (2012) by Leo Ruickbie; www.modernghana.com/



while it was in their room. He also reports the dogs would not stop barking at it."

Inevitably, this attracted a lot of publicity, Ms Brady adding: "Actually, a lot of people are interested because it's haunted supposedly".

Before long both pieces were successfully sold to two regular customers intrigued enough to pay the full price of \$1,000. One of the purchasers, Ricky Scott, stated: "I don't really care they think it's haunted... We actually live really close to Gravity Hill, which they say is haunted here in Rowan County... Let's hope it's a nice ghost." Time will tell, Mr Scott. (www.foxnews.com/real-estate/thrift-store-warns-buyers-of-haunted-furniture-for-sale-reports-of-continuous-nightmares)

While we have no reason to doubt the genuineness and the sincerity of the

news/200463/parliament-investigates-haunted-chair-saga.html.

In 2015 the *Daily Mail* cited a number of examples of what it branded “The world’s most haunted pieces of furniture” (25 April 2015), including a “conjure chest”, a “cursed portrait” and a “chair of death” with a summary of their alleged grim histories. Appearing on their list were the notorious ‘Crying Boy’ picture “spotted at scene of house fires” [FT46:22-23, 47:36, 69:17, 234:32-38]; “haunted bunk beds of Wisconsin [that] terrorised a whole family in 1987” and a claim that four people died after sitting upon a ‘cursed’ 200-year-old wooden seat from Philadelphia.

A sprinkling of such stories can be found in the psychic newspapers over many years, e.g. “Dead owner haunts couple who buy her chest of drawers” (*Psychic News*, 30 Dec 1972). Local papers, adept at magnifying the significance of parochial dramas and tales, also enjoy them. In 2013 the *Warrington Guardian* recalled how “the old cottage of Firth Place on Froghall Lane was home to an old lady named Jenny Lightfoot, who spent her days rocking to and fro in her rocking chair... After her death, the rocking chair was sold to a pawn broker for half-a-crown, but was quickly given away after passers-by noticed the chair rocking silently on its own... For generations, the rocking chair has been passed from home to home with many afraid of the consequences should they throw the chair away.” (*Warrington Guardian*, 31 Oct 2013).

The problem with so many of these stories is that they are so obviously synthetic, like many of the items themselves. Rarely do such tales rise much above the level of ‘The Nurse’s Return’ recounted in Elliot O’Donnell’s collection of spine-chillers, *The Midnight Hearse And Other Ghosts* (1965). Briefly told, the story avers that a certain unnamed army general and his wife were once haunted by increasingly disturbing visions of a faceless nurse in a grey uniform. Consulting a doctor knowledgeable of psychical research, he diagnosed the cause as their innocent purchase of an antique writing desk with an unfortunate history. The desk belonged to a nurse who had committed suicide after accusations of mistreating mental patients. When the couple disposed of the desk the haunting ceased. No details are provided other than it supposedly occurred in Fleetwood, Lancashire, “a few summers ago”, but since it draws upon a collection of O’Donnell’s writings composed over 60 years, it could have dated back as far as the Edwardian era, though in all likelihood it never occurred at all.

Similarly, two generations have been misled by the tales spun about the most famous piece of haunted furniture



Busby pronounced a curse over the chair as he left for the final drop from the scaffold



in Great Britain in the last 75 years, a cursed pub chair known as the ‘Busby Stoop’ in Yorkshire. This malicious seat received national coverage in a 1970s broadcast of the BBC TV news and current affairs programme *Nationwide*, known for its sometimes-irreverent approach to news reporting (it also publicised the cursed bottles in a pub in Alnwick, Northumberland). The chair is now displayed in Thirsk Museum in Yorkshire.

In 1702 Thomas Busby was found guilty of the murder of his father-in-law and forgery, and sentenced to be hanged and gibbeted outside the Busby Stoop Inn where he was a regular drinker, and which still stands today south of Thornton-le-Moor at the crossroads between the A61 and A167.

LEFT: The ‘Busby Stoop’, Britain’s most famous piece of haunted furniture. **BELOW:** Yorkshire’s Thirsk Museum, where the chair now resides.

Before his execution, Busby was permitted one last drink in his favourite chair in the inn. After swallowing his last drop of ale, he pronounced a curse over the chair as he left for the final drop from the scaffold, declaring all who sat in it thereafter were doomed to suffer and die.

In the years afterwards, the chair was said to have claimed up to 60 victims. In the mid-1970s landlord Anthony Earnshaw told four stories of reckless individuals known to him who mocked the curse and died very soon after occupying the seat. The first two were an army sergeant and a teenage bricklayer, after which the chair was locked away. This failed to prevent two more deaths. A personal friend of Earnshaw aged 42 died unexpectedly after sitting in it, as did a fellow member of his local Masonic lodge, both men having recklessly chosen to disregard all warnings and snatch an opportunity to sit on it when Earnshaw showed it to them. Fearful of more fatalities, in 1978 Earnshaw presented the chair to Thirsk Museum on the proviso that it should be hung from the ceiling so no one could sit on it again (*Morning Advertiser*, January 1987). As the Museum confirms, “The Busby Stoop chair has not been sat on since”.

When museum experts carried out an examination in 2016, they concluded it was actually manufactured after the 1840s, at least 138 years too late for Thomas Busby ever to have sat, quaffed or cursed in it, if dating was accurate (*Northern Echo*, 2 Jan 2018).

This was not surprising. Ian Wilson, author of *In Search of Ghosts* (1995), observed its reputation was “in tatters” after needing to make only one telephone call locally to the current landlord of the Busby Stoop pub, establishing that the story was wholly unknown prior to World War II. Furthermore, none of the names of the alleged victims were available or could be checked in local records.

The problem was having so seemingly solid a witness as the Yorkshire landlord endorse the story with a claimed first-hand association. Another example of what seems like another invented joke sustained for years was the tale of a haunted rocking chair contained in a second volume of a memoir, *Further Particulars* (1987) by CH Rolph (1901-1994), recalling his varied life as a City of London police officer turned author and criminal justice reformer. Rolph set down the story in all seriousness, and never otherwise concerned himself with paranormal matters (despite working on penal reform campaigns with Arthur



GHOSTWATCH

Koestler, whose 1983 bequest founded the Koestler Chair of Parapsychology at Edinburgh University). Thus, it constituted his one and only ghost story, which he believed to be true. He originally received it in 1919 from a Maida Vale clerk named Bert Trotman, who described encountering a haunted rocking chair when trying to solve the mystery of an abandoned hotel at Bramford, Suffolk, in the late 19th or early 20th century.

A murder had supposedly been committed in the hotel, with the body of the victim found tied to a rocking chair, some 20 years before. Trotman went up to Suffolk with another man named Mayhew to spend the night at the creaking and overgrown building, lured by the promise of £100 reward if they did so. They took Mayhew's pet bulldog with them. During their vigil, their lamps failed and the dog went berserk in the dark. When the lamps were relit, the animal was found to be dead. In the middle of the room was a large Windsor rocking chair, moving of its own volition. The terrified men fled, but once outside realised they ought to go back to collect the dead dog. Summoning their courage, they returned to collect the dog and were aghast to see the chair rocking even more violently. They fled again, "Their second exit, more resolute even than the first one, took up less of their time."

Trotman told Rolph this story in 1919. Over 20 years later in 1941, Rolph met Mayhew, who confirmed it in every detail, other than "that the dog was a Boston terrier and not a bulldog". For Rolph, this left an "uneasy acknowledgement for the occult, and an uneasy and ineradicable distaste of rocking chairs".

However, the tale contains a number of improbabilities, not least in that Bramford was not some isolated hamlet but a thriving village three miles from Ipswich. In particular, the village underwent a major haunted house scare in 1887 with a poltergeist outbreak covered in the *East Anglian Daily Times* (8 Dec 1888), which attracted a lot of contemporary attention, yet the haunted hotel story seems completely absent from news records. It seems improbable that such a notoriously haunted property would have gone unmentioned, especially if a reward of £100 was offered, given the depressed level of agricultural wages at the time. Of course, it is possible that further research may turn up further details, but I am inclined to think it was a case of two friends winding up the young CH Rolph with their rocking chair ghost tale, and keeping the joke running for two decades, by which time Rolph had reached the rank of police inspector. False allegations,



ABOVE: Dr CEM Joad (left) and Harry Price settle down in a haunted bed in Chiswick in 1932.

BELOW: AA MacGregor's *Phantom Footsteps* included a chapter devoted to haunted chairs.

wasting police time and the sharing of barmy stories with police officers to get attention is nothing new, continuing to this day as freedom of information requests regularly demonstrate.

Ian Wilson is one of handful of ghost hunters who has pursued claims of haunted furniture and relics with any degree of diligence. The idea of the dead returning to take a seat on chairs is a widespread one; in September 1999 at the Spiritualist centre at the Castle Hasdeu temple at Campina, Romania, I saw examples of 'spirit chairs' specially manufactured at the end of the 19th century for materialised spirits,

provided on the basis that having travelled across the boundary between life and death they had come a long way and were in need of rest!

However, with stories of spontaneous ghost experiences, it seems the idea is that post-mortem former occupants remain tethered to their chairs like a goat to a post. After Dennis Bardens broadcast the case of a reputedly haunted chair for BBC radio on 21 December 1949, he looked into the case of another haunted chair bought at an auction by a Mrs Barbara Barnes of Barton on Humber, which came with the ghost of an old man. The silent form appeared periodically seated in it whenever it stood in her kitchen. Her daughter Barbara had also seen the ghost. Bardens found her story plausible. When he sat in the chair, he felt nothing untoward, although he admitted he might not like to spend a night in it.

Another writer who was particularly interested in chair-based hauntings was Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, providing a

chapter entirely devoted to them in his book *Phantom Footsteps* (1959). His most recent was the story of a phantom, seen in a house in Pembrokeshire at Christmas 1956 by a retired Indian Army Colonel named George Rind. MacGregor also believed ghosts could be photographed in chairs. Although a competent photographer himself, and rather proud of his reputation as such, he seems to have been prepared to suspend caution when it came to psychic photographs, to the extent of declaring: "I harbour not a vestige of doubt that the camera may record on a negative a human or other presence unseen by the actual photographer." He reproduced a fine example in his book, allegedly obtained at a property in Sunbury on Thames.

Harry Price was famously pictured in a haunted bed in a museum in Chiswick with philosopher CEM Joad. Numerically speaking, stories of haunted chairs and all other pieces of furniture are far exceeded by stories of haunted beds; statistically speaking, there is a higher chance of seeing a ghost while you are in bed than at any other time. Stories involving beds and poltergeist infestations are legion, but these tend to be short-lived and person-centred, along with accounts of people who feel bedclothes stripped from them during the night or suffer attentions from 'bedroom invaders'. Psychoanalyst and psychical researcher Nandor Fodor gave haunted bed stories a predictably Freudian interpretation in *The Haunted Mind* (1959).

I stayed in a reputedly haunted bed at the Crown Inn, Bideston, Suffolk, in June 1997 and in a room at the Saffron Hotel, Saffron Walden, Essex, with an allegedly haunted chair in it in 2009. I witnessed nothing on either occasion.

All you need to know about electric cars...



Hand-drawn text bubbles above the couple:

- How much will I save? £% /
- Are they expensive to insure?
- What's it like to drive? →
- How fast are they? ←
- How long will it take to charge?
- How much does it cost to run? !?

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KARL SHUKER hails a palæontological discovery that may shed light on a monstrous cryptid

A FOSSIL NANDI BEAR?

One day in 2013, while conducting postgraduate research at Kenya's Nairobi Museum, palæontologist Matthew Borths from Ohio University opened a cabinet drawer and made a truly incredible discovery: an enormous fossil lower jawbone bearing some teeth, plus some individual teeth, a heel bone, and some distal toe bones. Borths learned that they had been collected in 1978-1980 during excavations at an early Miocene fossil bed named Meswa Bridge, in western Kenya, but had never been formally examined, lying forgotten and unstudied ever since. Moreover, he discovered that another Ohio University palæontological researcher, Nancy Stevens, had also seen them in that same drawer when she too had been conducting research at Nairobi Museum. After Borths contacted her, they researched the remains and revealed that they belonged to a hitherto undescribed but quite enormous species of primitive mammalian carnivore known as a hyænodont.

The hyænodont lineage's most recent fossils are around five million years old (those of the giant new species were some 22 million years old), after which they apparently became extinct. Using three different methods to estimate size, Borths and Stevens obtained estimated total body masses for this very belatedly recognised species of 280kg (617lb), 1,308kg (2,884lb), and 1,554kg (3,426lb), plus a total length estimated at up to 2.5m (8ft) and a height of up to 0.75m (2ft 6in). If the creature had attained the upper estimates of mass, length, and height, it would have been at least as big as the polar bear, today's largest terrestrial mammalian carnivore. In a 17 April 2019 *Journal of Paleontology* paper, they formally named this giant hyænodont *Simbakubwa kutokaafrika*, which is Swahili for 'big lion from Africa'. For although entirely unrelated to it, this huge beast would definitely have been an apex predator in its time, just like the lion is today.

All in all, an exceedingly interesting palæontological find – but what bearing does it have upon cryptozoology? Let's rephrase that question as: don't you just love totally random, coincidences? Kisumu County in western Kenya contains Meswa Bridge, the site where the long-overlooked remains of a monstrously huge fossil mammalian carnivore were discovered; and Kisumu County just so happens to be situated immediately below western Kenya's Nandi County, which contains the dense, once-contiguous Nandi Forest



ABOVE: An artistic reconstruction of what *Simbakubwa* might have looked like.

LEFT: Matthew Borths with his discovery.



where a monstrously huge mystery mammalian carnivore dubbed the Nandi bear has been reported many times.

But what is, or was, the Nandi bear? (Alleged sightings during the past 70 years have been far fewer than back in the early 20th century, leading to speculation that even if it were real, it may now have died out.) In fact, this ferocious, greatly feared cryptid has been described in so many different ways by eyewitnesses down through the years that some cryptozoologists, including Dr Bernard Heuvelmans and myself, have opined that the Nandi bear is almost certainly a non-existent composite. That is to say, it has been 'created' via the erroneous lumping together by native traditions and Western investigators alike of sightings of several very different animals, known and unknown, which may include such disparate species as hyænas, baboons, large male ratels, aardvarks, and possibly even one or more prehistoric survivors, like the giant short-faced hyæna *Pachycrocuta brevirostris*,

the African bear *Agriotherium africanum*, the giant baboon *Dinopithecus ingens*, and/or maybe one of those bizarre claw-footed ungulates known as chalicotheres. All of these were still in existence in Africa as recently as the Pleistocene (2.5 million to 11.7 thousand years ago), as confirmed by fossil finds.

Should a surviving hyænodontid (not necessarily *Simbakubwa* itself, but potentially a modern-day reclusive descendant, one whose morphology and gait may have changed somewhat during the 22 million years of evolution occurring from *Simbakubwa*'s time into modern times) now also be added to this list? Who can say? Everything about the Nandi bear is highly speculative, but my cryptozoological antennæ definitely began twitching when I saw how unexpectedly close to one another were the fossil bed where *Simbakubwa*'s remains were found and the Nandi Forest where the Nandi bear was traditionally reported. Just for the record, I have modified my opinion recently as to the most likely identity of the Nandi bear, thanks to a remarkable and exceedingly exciting but previously obscure report that I only lately obtained, and which I am now actively investigating. More news if and when I have it.

www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02724634.2019.1570222; www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2019/04/new-species-ancient-carnivore-was-bigger-than-polar-bear-hyaenodonts/; www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190418080758.htm; www.thevintagenews.com/2019/04/22/fossil-in-a-drawer/.



GARFIELD FLOTSAM | For years, the beaches of Brittany have been littered with novelty phones – now the mystery seems to have been solved



PHOTOS: FRED TANNEAU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: A plastic 'Garfield' phone is displayed on the beach in Le Conquet, western France, on 30 March.

BELOW: Claire Simonin-Le Meur searches for Garfield phones in a partially submerged cave only accessible at low tide.

For the last 35 years, the Iroise coast in Brittany has been littered with bits of bright orange landline novelty phones shaped like Garfield, the lazy and lasagne-loving cartoon cat created in 1978 by American Jim Davis for a comic-strip. Sometimes it was just the grinning face or the eyes – designed to open when anyone picked up the receiver. Other times, a headless orange fat torso complete with curly wire, dialpad and plug. Claire Simonin-Le Meur, president of the environmental group *Ar Viltansoù*, said the common belief among locals was that the phones came from a wayward shipping container that must have sunk to the seabed, leaving them to fear Garfield's plastic toxicity would continue to pollute the ocean indefinitely. In 2018 alone, at least 200 pieces of Garfield were found on beaches in northwestern France.

Then in February this year, Simonin-Le Meur got a tip from René Morvan, a local farmer. He remembered the first *téléphone*

A headless orange fat torso complete with curly wire, dialpad and plug



Garfield appearing after a storm in 1983. He and his brother toured the local coastline and found a metal shipping container stuffed with Garfield

phones wedged 100ft (30m) inside a cave, deep in the cliffs at Plouarzel, only accessible at low tide, but which spat out the telephones at high tide, when the sea rises up to 8m/26ft. Climbing down the slippery rocks to the cave in mid-March, a group of anti-litter activists and journalists, including Simonin-Le Meur, spotted the container, partially buried.

"At the cave opening there was a Garfield lodged in the roof," said Simonin-Le Meur, "so we knew we weren't mistaken and this was where they were." Fabien Boileau, the director of the Natural Sea Park of Iroise, also visited the cave, but said the mystery was only partly solved. "We have no idea what happened at the time, where it came from, what ship it was or if one or several containers fell in the sea," he said. According to the *Guardian*, the container remains inaccessible and "nobody knows how many telephones it still contains", while the *Washington Post* report said it was empty. According to the *Daily Telegraph*

Simonin-Le Meur said: "We found 23 complete handsets with electronics and wires. They were everywhere." Reports of Garfield phones from farther afield may suggest that more than one container was lost in the shipwreck. It is unlikely the beach cleaners of Iroise have seen the last of Garfield. *BBC News*, 28 Mar; *Washington Post* online, nrk.no, 29 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, *Guardian* 30 Mar 2019.

- We are reminded of the Chinese plastic animals that washed up on beaches round the world for many years. The bath toys were being shipped to the US from Hong Kong when 20 containers fell into the Pacific during a storm in January 1992 [FT177:10]. At least one container was forced open, spilling its cargo of 29,000 toys – yellow ducks, red beavers, green frogs and blue turtles. Two thirds floated south, landing months later on the shores of Indonesia, Australia and South America, while 10,000 headed north and by November were off Alaska and heading back westwards. It took three years for the toys to reach Japan, past the original drop site and then back to Alaska before continuing north to the Arctic. Thousands ended up frozen in Arctic pack ice and drifted east to the Atlantic at about a mile a day. In 2000 the first intrepid weather-beaten toys were found off Greenland. Soon they were sighted bobbing in the waves from Maine to Massachusetts. By 2007, they were heading for British shores; two children's books had been written about the saga and the toys had become collector's items, changing hands for £500 [FT226:5]. Then there were the 34,000 ice hockey gloves that went overboard in 1994, the five million pieces of lego lost off Land's End in 1997, and the 33,000 Nike trainers lost off California in 2002 – all grist for oceanographers studying currents.

EXHIBITION REPORT

MOONSCAPES

DAVID BARRETT enjoys a celebration of lunar-inspired art at the Watts Gallery

The Moon has held us fascinated for countless thousands of years. This familiar bright light moving across the sky at night, changing shape over the month, has intrigued and captivated poets, artists and lovers. Usually female, because of her link to the menstrual cycle, the Moon is closely tied to the rhythms of our lives.

The Watts Gallery near Guildford specialises in Victorian art, so it's startling to be greeted by an extraordinary construction in the gardens as you arrive: the Cosmoscope, a huge light and sound metal sculpture created by three academics from the University of Hertfordshire's School of Creative Arts. Sculptor Prof Simeon Nelson worked with two composers, Rob Godman and Dr Nick Rothwell to create a sphere which links the infinite with the infinitesimal, the wonders of the Universe to the structure of an atom, a beautiful framework sphere with lights flickering in time to computerised music.

Inside, the first piece displayed is again modern: Charlie Barton's huge painting *Artemis*, made from resin and layers of paint building up a beautifully textured lunar surface. Rupert Senior's *The Moon Cabinet* is craftsman-made; the very thin cabinet doors, shaped like the crescent and three-quarter Moon, are made of carbon fibre for strength, covered in burr ash. Circular holes in the doors reveal craters gilded in yellow gold, palladium and "moon gold" leaf – but when the doors are opened the craters transform into planets circling in a Solar System floating against the depth of a blue night sky. It's an exquisite work of art.

Moonscapes bills itself as "the first exhibition to explore 19th-century visions of the Moon", and the main focus is



on 19th-century artistic and scientific responses. There's a French lunar globe from the very end of the century; because the far side of the Moon had not yet been seen, the space on the back of the globe is filled with a list of the 343 named craters on the near side. Stereoscopic photographs were popular from the 1850s onwards; two images of the Moon side by side, when viewed together produce a three-dimensional impression.

The Victorians loved technology, and were endlessly inventive. But close-up photographs of the Moon were beyond their capability; instead, Scottish engineer James Naismith (he invented the steam hammer) created an astonishingly detailed painting in gouache of Copernicus Crater.

In the gallery downstairs we come to what the Watts specialises in: Victorian art. Many artists explored moonlit

nocturnal landscapes, including three generations of the same family: Abraham Pether, who so established himself as Britain's leading artist of moonlit landscapes in the late 18th century, exploring the effects of moonlight on architecture from rural cottages to urban landscapes, that he was known as 'Moonlight Pether'. His son Sebastian Pether and his grandson Henry Pether carried on the family tradition.

Hampstead Hill looking down Heath Street is a typical painting by Leeds artist John Atkinson Grimshaw: rain-soaked streets at night, lit by the Moon and dim gaslights. There's an unusual Holman Hunt, *Homeward Bound: The Pathless Waters*, which he painted in 1869 during a voyage from Italy to Israel.

And then there are Moon goddesses. Study of the Moon's geology today is called selenology, after Selene, one of the Greek goddesses of the Moon; another was Artemis, goddess of the hunt. Their Roman equivalents are Luna and Diana. The Chinese Moon goddess Chang'e gave her name to the first successful landing on the far side of the Moon in January this year in the Chang'e 4 mission.

Two very different interpretations of the myth of Diana falling in love with the beautiful shepherd Endymion catch the eye, by GF Watts (the gallery was built to display his work) and Edward John Poynter; and there are some stunning paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite-influenced Evelyn de Morgan, including her wonderful vision of moonbeams as bathers, *Moonbeams Dipping into the Sea*, the three female figures representing the waxing, full and waning Moon, birth, life and death.

The combination of Victorian and contemporary art in this small but intriguing exhibition makes for a worthwhile celebration of mankind's fascination with our nearest neighbour.

Moonscapes is at the Watts Gallery, Guildford until 23 June



MANCHESTER ART GALLERY



WATTS GALLERY TRUST



PRIVATE COLLECTION

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OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: *Cosmoscope*, Simeon Nelson, Rob Goodman, Nick Rothwell, 2016-18. **OPPOSITE PAGE TOP:** Charlie Barton, *Artemis*, 2015. **TOP LEFT:** Frederic James Shields, *Hamlet and the Ghost*, 1901. **TOP RIGHT:** Helen Allingham, *Harvest Moon*, 1879. **ABOVE:** GF Watts, *Endymion*, 1903-04. **RIGHT:** Evelyn De Morgan, *Moonbeams Dipping into the Sea*, 1900.



FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | Anti-vaxxers, child-snatching panics, possessed sofas, and the myth of Hess's double laid to rest

VAXXED OFF [FT377:16-17]



Behind the dramatic growth of the anti-vaccination movement is the Internet. Anti-vaxxer groups have used social media to spread their message, and several anti-vaccine books appear as bestsellers in Amazon's Epidemiology category. The curation engines and recommendation algorithms that power platforms like Amazon, Google and Facebook have brought fringe ideas to the mainstream. Search, trending and recommendation algorithms can be gamed. Analysis of the (mostly five-star) Amazon customer reviews for another 'truthier' book (*The Truth About Cancer*) showed that of the 1,684 reviews, over 1,000 were suspect (customer reviews are believed to be an important component of Amazon's rankings algorithms).

In response to the 'truthier' onslaught, YouTube has demonetised and downranked its anti-vaxxer content, whilst Google has long had a *Your Money or Your Life* (YMYL) policy requiring higher standards of evaluation for web pages which can have an impact on a person's current or future well-being (physical, financial, safety, etc.).

Facebook hasn't banned anti-vaccine misinfo, arguing that it is best combatted by accurate counter-information explaining the benefits of vaccination and the risks of avoidance. Renee DiResta, co-founder of Vaccinate California, says: "The idea that we can have counter-speech when [Facebook] groups become brigade mobs is ludicrous [...] We are at the point where doctors are creating their own anti-vaxx social media attack response teams to help other doctors."

Chad Hermann, communications director of the Kids Plus Pediatrics (KPP) practice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, warns that "Many providers and even whole hospitals are afraid of posting pro-vaccine material on Facebook simply for fear of putting a



ABOVE: Members of the Roma community after an attack on their camp in Bobigny, near Paris, on 25 March.

bullseye on their backs," adding "when they stop posting that information, it leaves a vacuum, and we all know who is going to fill that."

In 2017, KPP's practice was targeted by anti-vaxxer groups, not only on its Facebook page but via Yelp and Google Map ratings. This is a common tactic. "Their goal is to tell my patients what a bad person I am so I lose business," explained Elias Kass, a pro-vaccine naturopath who has also been targeted.

KPP decided to combat the attacks not only by deleting and blocking hostile posters, but by encouraging other medical practitioners to use social media and disseminate the #VaccinesWork message, and to assist others when targeted. "If you're being attacked, we'll light the signal fires of Gondor, and you'll have pro-science, pro-vaccine cavalry come to your aid," said Hermann. *theguardian.com*, 27 Feb; *wired.com*, 5 Mar 2019.

CHILD SNATCHER PANIC [FT371:20-21]



A series of unprovoked vigilante attacks on France's Roma community erupted after false

reports spread online about a "man in a white van" kidnapping children and others off the streets to fuel prostitution rings or the illegal organ trade. Sometimes the van is red or yellow, in a different region, or of Bulgarian or Romanian origin. The reports spread rapidly on Whatsapp, Snapchat, and other social media networks, but there was zero evidence of any of them. Nonetheless, rumours continued to spread, along with video footage of attacks on van drivers 'matching' a supposed description of the alleged kidnapper, across several regions. Some showed a van passing at speed to escape men on foot. Another shows a person huddled in a white van, with its door open, while hooded men throw rocks at them. Some 20 people were arrested on 25 March after attacking the Roma community in the neighbouring Clichy-sous-Bois and Bobigny areas, north-east of central Paris. The attackers, numbering around 70, carried baseball bats, knives, and rocks.

The child abductor in a van – usually a white one – is a well-known trope. Hundreds of similar reports and warnings abound online from local news outlets across the globe. France's

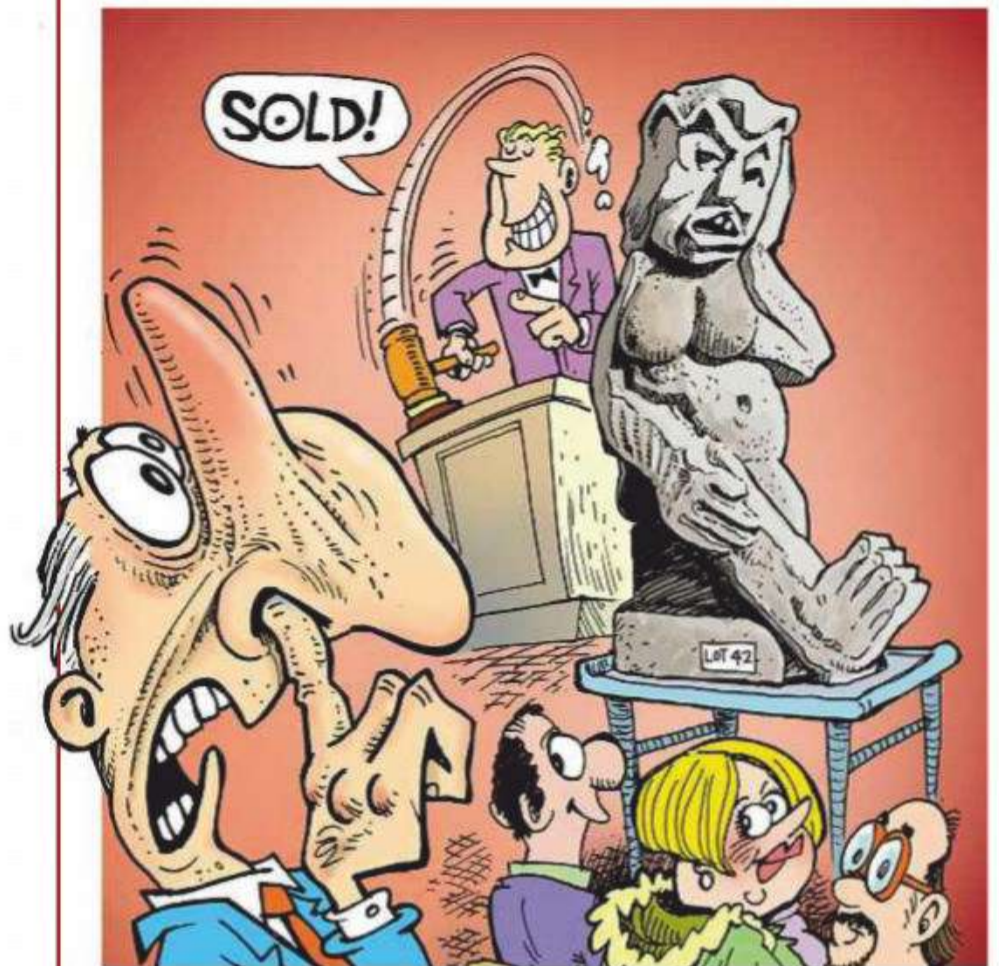
Libération newspaper said that the story had "haunted the web for years" in Belgium, Germany and France. Yet the risk of child abduction by strangers is real enough. In the UK, there were 1,189 child abduction offences in 2017/18. 20 per cent were committed by a family member, 40 per cent by non-family that the child knows, and the remaining 40 per cent by strangers (about 475 offences), but most of those are attempted, rather than completed abductions. *BBC News*, 27 Mar 2019.

POSSESSED FURNITURE [FT370:21]



On 27 March, an unnamed couple from Oshakati in Namibia took their black household goods to the Ongwediva dumping site because they were "demonic". These included leather sofas, a kitchen cupboard, a flat-screen TV, cooking utensils, bedroom sheets, and two plastic chairs. The husband (39) is a senior official at the finance ministry, while his wife (28) is unemployed. They had broken the TV screen, but the police stopped them from burning the furniture. They

237: SOLD TO THE MAN WITH THE ITCHY NOSE



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

People at auctions sometimes buy things by accident, because the auctioneer interprets their twitches, fidgets, coughs or stretches as bids. And once that happens, they're stuck with the item (invariably large and expensive, and usually comical to boot) because a bid constitutes a binding contract.

The "truth"

Fear of the accidental bid – of ending up owning a haunted stately home just because you scratched your ear, or nodded to an acquaintance, at the wrong moment – is, many auctioneers believe, one of the main things that puts people off attending auctions. It's certainly common enough in sitcoms and films, but as far as anyone is aware it has never happened in real life. Indeed, auction houses insist that it couldn't happen: bids are made by unambiguously holding up your hand, or your bidder's card, to attract the hammer-wielder's attention. She will then make eye contact with you, to be sure that you both have hold of the right end of the stick. It is true, however, that a bid is legally binding, which has created problems in online auctions when customers have claimed they've accidentally pressed the 'buy' button. Recent cases have included the man who said he'd only been trying to close his browser when he inadvertently bought a 30-tonne, quarter of a million quid, antique merry-go-round.

Sources

<https://bruun-rasmussen.dk/m/static/guide/myths.html>; www.auctionhouse.co.uk/guide/is-it-possible-to-accidentally-bid; www.derbytelegraph.co.uk/news/derby-news/can-you-really-accidentally-bid-600908; www.easyliveauction.com/blog/b2b299334bf35e8c2a196e2736d4a04c/be-sure-before-you-place-that-bid/

Disclaimer

It's never happened, says the auction industry with one voice. Sounds like a challenge to me: if you have a "mistaken bid" story that doesn't come from fiction or foaflore, please send it in.

were escorted home and it was explained to them that the items would be kept safe in case they change their minds about dumping them.

The man said he bought the sofas for N\$17,000 (£918), the TV for N\$6,000 (£324) and the cupboard for N\$3,000 (£162), while the bedding sheet was worth N\$200 (£10.80). "It does not help to cleanse ourselves and pass on the demons to other people," he stated. His wife said every time she slept on the sofas, she saw evil things. She added that they had yet to remove the stove and one more kitchen cupboard from their house, both of which are black.

The couple said they gave their lives to Jesus in 2010, and had been attending sermons at the Apostolic Faith Mission Rock of Salvation Church at Oshakati East – but it wasn't the church that had told them the household items were possessed. "God revealed to me in my dream that I should throw them away," said the man. "This has nothing to do with my pastor. The sofas also have signs of 666, which the Word says is a demonic sign." *namibian.com.na*, 28 Mar 2019.

RUDOLF HESS [FT64:34]



In an interview with *Fortean Times* in 1992, Michael Bentine (founder member of the *Goon Show*, who was fascinated by the paranormal) says this about Hitler's deputy: "Why was Rudolf Hess... the only prisoner in Spandau Prison, and guarded by four different nationalities 24 hours a day?" Airey Neave – who served with the International Military Tribunal at the Nuremberg Trials – had explained to Bentine that had the prosecution presented "the enormous amount of evidence that [the leading Nazis] were involved in black ritual practices", their very able defence lawyers would have pleaded insanity or diminished responsibility, "and the whole lot would have been consigned to a lunatic

asylum" rather than face the death penalty.

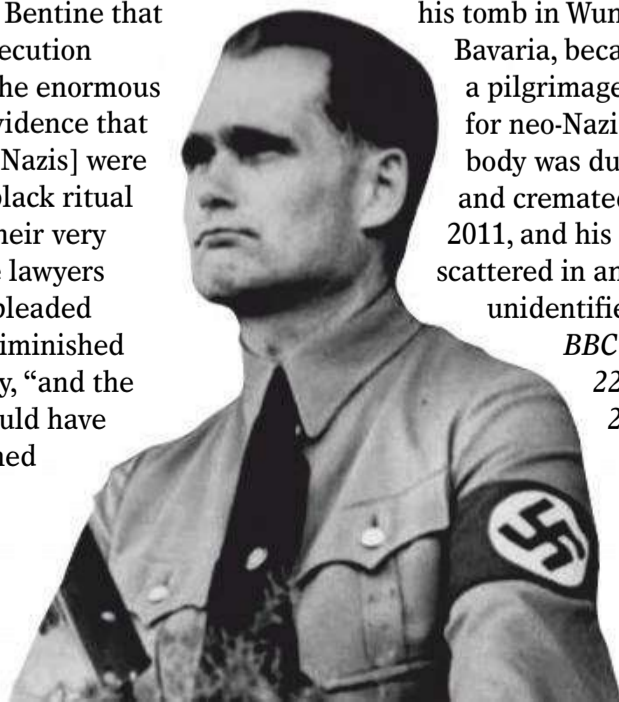
An enduring conspiracy theory that Hess had been replaced by a double in jail has finally been put to rest. Researchers at the University of Salzburg in Austria tracked down a distant male relative of Hess's and obtained a DNA sample. That was compared with tests of a blood sample taken in 1982 from the man known as Spandau prisoner No 7. The results showed a match of almost 100 per cent. One of the main proponents of the impostor theory was Hess's prison doctor, W Hugh Thomas. His theory was based, among other elements, on the fact that the man in Spandau bore physical differences with Hess and that he had refused to see his family for many years – not helped by the fact that he also seemed to suffer from apparent amnesia.

Hess was born in Alexandria in 1894, joined the Nazi party in 1920 and in 1923 was at Hitler's side for the Beer Hall Putsch. He was a keen promoter of homeopathy and holistic medicine. Homeopathy was highly popular with the Nazis, and seen as a possible tool to be used against what Hess called the "Jew infested medical profession". In 1941 he made a solo flight to Scotland, where his plane crash-landed, in an apparently unauthorised peace mission which was denounced by the Führer. He was imprisoned by the British for the duration of the war. At the Nuremberg trials in 1946, he was cleared of war crimes and crimes against humanity, but convicted of crimes against peace and jailed for life. He was found hanged in the Berlin jail

in 1987 at the age of 93. When his tomb in Wunsiedel,

Bavaria, became a pilgrimage site for neo-Nazis, his body was dug up and cremated in 2011, and his ashes scattered in an unidentified lake.

BBC News,
22 Jan
2019.





MEDICAL BAG

Our waiting room of female patients includes a woman who feels no pain, a woman with bees her in eye, and a woman who can hear her own eyeballs...

FAR OUT, MAN

Jo Cameron, 71, from Whitebridge, near Inverness, feels virtually no pain, and never gets anxious or afraid – because she is one of only two people in the world known to have a previously unrecognised mutation in a gene called FAAR-OUT (yes really), which may stop it switching on another gene that otherwise would make her feel pain. She only realised she was different from other people at the age of 65, when she felt no pain after normally agonising surgery on her hand left deformed by arthritis, and her anaesthetist sent her to pain geneticists, who discovered her rare condition.

Once diagnosed, the retired college lecturer realised that she wasn't just "incredibly healthy", as she'd believed. "When I was eight, I broke my arm roller-skating and didn't realise," she said. "It was three days later that my mother noticed it was hanging strangely. I am forever burning myself on our oven but only notice when I smell

the burning flesh. I cut myself and don't realise until I see the blood. I just feel clumsy – hardly like a superhero." Eating a Scotch bonnet chilli pepper left only a "pleasant glow". She didn't even feel pain during the birth of her two children. When a white van careered into her car on a remote country road in 2017, leaving her upside down in a ditch, it was she, totally unfazed, who found herself comforting the van driver. She suffered terrible bruising, but no discomfort at all. However, she does see the downside. "Pain is there for a reason, it warns you – you hear alarm bells," she said. "It would be nice to have warning when something's wrong. I didn't know my hip was gone until it was really gone. I physically couldn't walk with my arthritis." Also, she has never felt the "adrenaline rush" that other people talk about.

Her particular combination of genes boosts a chemical called anandamide, which makes her forgetful and less anxious, and also speeds up the healing

process. "The genetic mutations make me naturally high and I am always in a good mood, which can be annoying for my family." She cannot recall ever having felt depressed or scared. She believes she may have inherited the condition from her father Joseph. "He was a captain in the tank regiment in World War I and had shrapnel left in his leg but never felt pain," she said. He was never seen to take a painkiller in his life.

Mrs Cameron's case is the subject of a paper published in the *British Journal of Anaesthesia*, written by Dr Srivastava and Dr James Cox, of University College London. Dr Cox said: "People with rare insensitivity to pain can be valuable to medical research as we learn how their genetic mutations impact how they experience pain... We hope that with time, our findings might contribute to clinical research for post-operative pain and anxiety, and potentially chronic pain, PTSD and wound healing." For another woman unable to feel fear, see **FT329:25**; and for a pain-free boy, see **FT356:22**. *BBC News*, *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, *Sun*, 28 Mar; *NY Times*, 30 Mar 2019.

NOISY EYEBALLS

Pam Roberts, 49, has a rare brain condition that has left her hearing so sensitive she can hear her own heartbeat and the sound of her eyeballs moving. "The most difficult thing for me is hearing my voice all the time like a broken kazoo," she said. "I can't ever escape it." The mother of two suffers from Superior Semicircular Canal Dehiscence (SSCD) – an opening in the bone that covers part of the inner ear affecting hearing and balance. "I have to have background noise all the time to distract me from the sounds," she said. "It affects you mentally and makes you so depressed. I am a shell of my former self."

Although the cause is unknown, the condition can be present from birth; the average age for diagnosis is 45 (which is when Ms Roberts was

diagnosed). It affects about one per cent of the population and Ms Roberts has spoken with just 10 people who have the syndrome, via online forums. "Pam has become a recluse seeking refuge in the house – very different from the old Pam," said her partner Martyn Smith, 41, an X-ray engineer. "All day she hears the insides of her body – her eyeballs moving, her footsteps, her own voice too loud inside her head and her breathing." He has launched a fundraising page to raise £5,500 to fly her to the US for a craniotomy by SSCD specialists. *D.Mail*, 15 Jan 2019.

HEART'S IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Rose Marie Bentley, who died aged 99 in October 2017, donated her body to research at a university in Portland, Oregon. Anatomy students noticed many of her organs were not where they were supposed to be. She had situs inversus with levocardia, which means her liver, stomach and other abdominal organs were reversed right to left – the mirror image of normal human anatomy. Her heart, however, remained in the normal position, on the left side of her body. She had lived a very healthy life, without any chronic conditions except for arthritis. Despite having three organs removed during her life, only the surgeon who took out her appendix recorded its unusual location in his notes. Mrs Bentley, who lived in rural Molalla south of Portland, was an avid swimmer, raised



ABOVE: Jo Cameron, the woman who feels no pain. RIGHT: Rose Marie Bentley.





ABOVE: A TV news report about the Taiwanese woman with sweat bees living inside her eye (no doubt greeted with cries of "Nooooooo!" by viewers). BELOW: A train pulls out of Kollupitiya, Sri Lanka, hopefully, in this case, without a headless body on board.

five children and helped her husband James run a pet food store. He died about 15 years ago.

Situs inversus with levocardia is rare, occurring about once in every 22,000 births. It is normally associated with life-threatening heart issues and other abnormalities, making Mrs Bentley's long life even more exceptional. Dr Cam Walker, an assistant professor of anatomy at Oregon Health and Science University, estimates that only one in 50 million people born with this condition live into adulthood. He and his colleagues believe Mrs Bentley may be the oldest ever recorded – there are only two other known cases where patients reached the age of 70. *USA Today*, 8 April; *BBC News*, 9 April; *D.Mail*, 11 April 2019.

BEES IN HER EYE

A Taiwanese woman was found to have four small sweat bees living inside her eye. The 28-year-old woman, identified only as Ms He, was weeding around the family graves during the annual Qing Ming tomb-sweeping festival in southern Taiwan when, she said, "I felt wind blowing into my face, then I felt something in my eye which I thought was sand or dirt. I

cleaned my eye using water but it started hurting a lot at night, a sharp pain, and I was tearing up." She sought medical help. Dr Hong Chi Ting said he was 'shocked' when he pulled the 4mm insects out by their legs. They were still alive and were sent for study.

Sweat bees, also known as halictidæ, nest near graves and in fallen trees, and are found all over the world. They are attracted to sweat and sometimes land on people to imbibe perspiration. They also drink tears for their high protein content – although a case of them actually living in someone's eye and feeding on their tear ducts is apparently unprecedented. Dr Hong said that Ms He was 'lucky' that she did not rub her eyes while the bees were inside. "She was wearing contact lenses so she didn't dare rub her eyes in case she broke the lens," he said. "If she had done, she could have induced the bees to produce venom. She could have gone blind." *asiaone.com*, 8 April; *BBC News*, 10 April; *D.Telegraph*, 11 April 2019.

HAZARDS OF ORAL SEX

According to a report in the *British Medical Journal*, an unnamed 44-year-old British

woman blacked out while receiving oral sex from her partner. When she remained unconscious for two to three minutes, her partner took her to A&E in London. The man told doctors his partner's body had gone stiff during coitus. The woman told doctors she had a splitting headache. At first, they thought she had suffered a seizure, but later learned she had experienced a blackout caused by a sudden lack of blood supply to the brain, also known as reflex-mediated syncope. A CT scan showed she had an aneurysm, leading to

a subarachnoid hæmorrhage – a kind of stroke. She was treated with a procedure called endovascular coiling, which uses a catheter to transmit a tiny coil to seal off the aneurysm from blood flow. She was released from the hospital 15 days later. *huffpost.com*, 20 Mar 2019.

BLOOD ON THE TRACKS

A man in his mid-thirties, dressed in jeans and T-shirt, committed suicide by jumping in front of a train near Kollupitiya in Sri Lanka. The train drew to a halt and officials collected the body, which had been decapitated, and decided to take it to the next station.

"According to the regulations, they should have carried the headless body to the guard's wagon," said Railways General Manager SM Abeywickrama. "But because that wagon was several compartments away, and they regarded keeping to the train schedule as their priority, they instead placed it in the nearest compartment, which contained more than 50 passengers, including schoolchildren. The floor was spattered with blood, and profuse bleeding from the severed neck continued until the headless body was handed over at the next station. Several passengers made complaints, and I have warned relevant officials that they must work according to regulations at all times, and show more consideration to commuters." (*Sri Lanka Daily News*, 10 Oct, 30 Nov 2017.



REHMAN ABUBAKR / CREATIVE COMMONS



NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to one of America's strangest political animals, as well as a writer of conspiratorial bestsellers and an artist of the irrational



ABOVE: Lyndon LaRouche in 2006. BELOW: Artist Susan Hiller.

LYNDON LAROUCHE

Lyndon LaRouche, who ran for US President eight times (once from jail), thought that “history is nothing but conspiracies.” He claimed that the Royal Family was set on terrorising the US into becoming a British colony again, giving the House of Windsor a monopoly in the US cocaine market. The only person powerful enough to foil this plot was Princess Diana, so she had to be eliminated. It was his mouthpiece, *The Executive Intelligence Review*, that made the claim – taken up by Mohammed Fayed, the phoney pharaoh of Harrods – that the Queen and Prince Philip were behind the death of the Princess.

LaRouche insisted that the Beatles were “a product shaped according to British Psychological Warfare Division specifications” to undermine American morals; that “the forces behind the World Wildlife Fund”, including the Duke of Edinburgh, were pushing the world towards a third world war; that Henry Kissinger was a communist

agent; that the Holocaust and global warming are hoaxes; and that Jews founded the Klu Klux Klan. He linked Mossad to the 9/11 attacks (which were a “Saudi-British conspiracy”) and blamed the Iraq war on Jewish financiers’ influence on the US.

LaRouche was born in New Hampshire to Quaker parents. Briefly a conscientious objector in WWII, he afterwards read economics at Northeastern University in Boston. From 1948 to 1963 he was active in the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party. He split from the SWP and formed a far left splinter group, the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC), which gained prominence during Vietnam protests at Columbia University in 1968. In 1973 he founded the US Labor Party, and first ran for President under its colours in 1976. In the 1970s he moved from Marxism to the far right. He grew rich through a company that developed computer software for the haulage industry and another that printed newspapers for high schools. He developed

links with farmers, the Nation of Islam, teamsters, abortion opponents and Klansmen. By the mid-1970s his movement had 37 offices in North America and 26 in Europe and Latin America. In the 1980s, through his group Panic (Prevent Aids Now Initiative Committee), LaRouche convinced two million Californian voters in a referendum that Aids was created by “the Soviet war machine” and that sufferers should be sent to quarantine camps to die. Fortunately, more voted the other way; and in all his bids for the presidency, he never polled more than the 76,000 votes he attracted in 1984.

In 1988, he was convicted of mail fraud and tax evasion (the prosecutor was Robert Mueller, who has been investigating Trump). LaRouche was paroled in 1994. Jim Bakker, the disgraced televangelist who served time with him in the same prison, said that LaRouche believed his cell was bugged. “To say that Lyndon was slightly paranoid,” said Bakker, “would be like saying the *Titanic* had a bit of a leak.”

Lyndon Hermyle LaRouche, conspiracist, born Rochester, NH, 8 Sept 1922; died 12 Feb 2019, aged 96.

DAVID YALLOP

Yallop was an investigative journalist who wrote popular books about true crime and conspiracy, including *In God's Name: An Investigation Into the Murder of Pope John Paul I* (1984). John Paul I was found dead at 65 in his chambers on 28 Sept 1978, only 33 days after assuming the papacy. He had a history of health problems, and the official cause of death was a heart attack. Yallop argued that he had been poisoned by a cabal connected to a secret Masonic

lodge that had infiltrated the Church and the Vatican Bank. The Vatican, which had fuelled rumours of conspiracy by issuing conflicting statements shortly after the Pope's death, called his claims “absurd fantasies”. *In God's Name* spent 15 weeks on *The Times's* best-seller list and won the Crime Writers' Association's Gold Dagger award for nonfiction in 1984. According to news reports and a foreword to a recent edition, the book has been translated into more than 30 languages and has sold more than six million copies.

Yallop's other books include *Deliver Us From Evil* (1981), on the Yorkshire Ripper murder case, and *Tracking the Jackal: The Search for Carlos, the World's Most Wanted Man* (1993), about Ilich Ramirez Sanchez, the Venezuelan terrorist better known as Carlos the Jackal, in different parts of the Middle East. He took on the Catholic Church in two more books, *The Power and the Glory: Inside the Dark Heart of John Paul II's Vatican* (2006) and *Beyond Belief: The Catholic Church and the Child Abuse Scandal* (2010).

David Anthony Yallop, journalist, born London 27 Jan 1937; died London 23 Aug 2018, aged 81.

SUSAN HILLER

Hiller studied anthropology in New Orleans, completing a PhD in 1965, but the Vietnam War and the radicalism of the late 1960s led her to believe that its practices and politics were suspect. In 1967 she moved to London. Using media including

film, video and sculpture, her artworks delved into the frontiers of consciousness. She was interested in the areas of our cultural collective experience that are concerned with devalued or

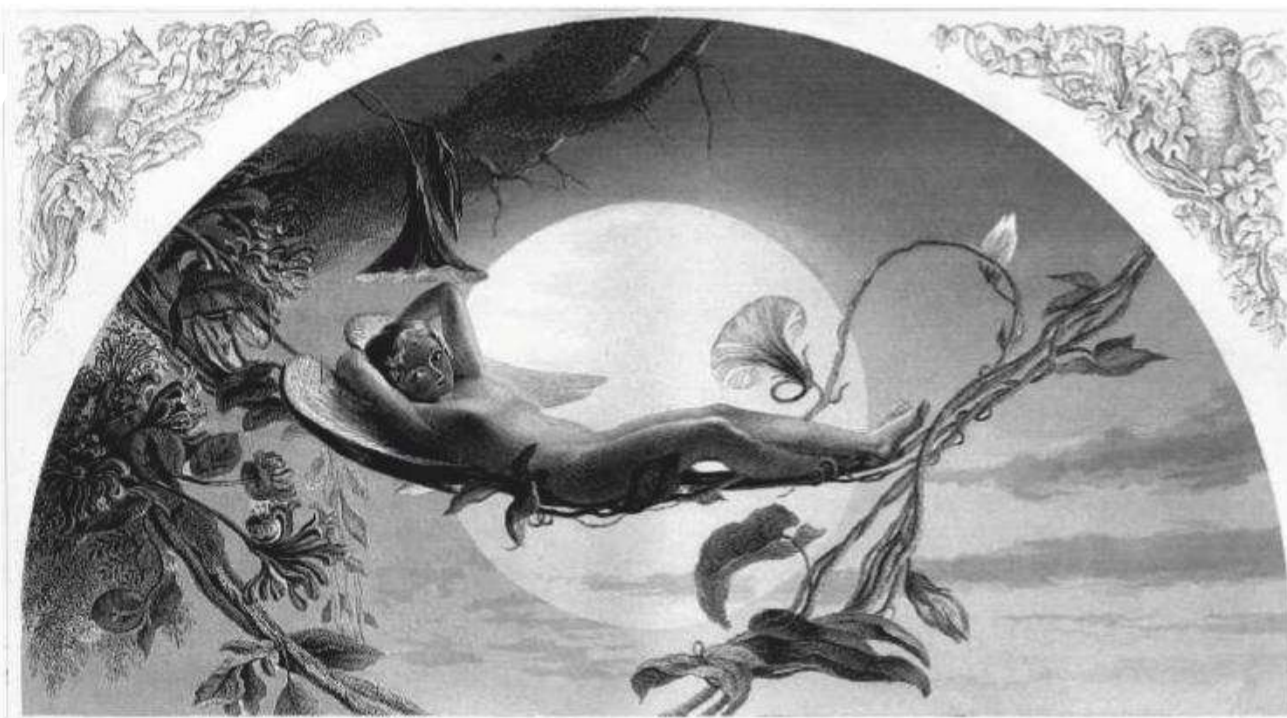




irrational experiences: the subconscious, the supernatural, the surreal, the mystical and the paranormal. She didn't apply systems of judgment to the work, refraining from ever categorising the experiences as 'true' or 'false', 'fact' or 'fiction'. Hiller described her practice as 'paraconceptual' a neologism that places her work between the conceptual and the paranormal. Many of her works explore the liminality of certain phenomena including the practice of automatic writing (*Sisters of Menon*, 1972/79; *Homage to Gertrude Stein*, 2010), near death experiences (*Clinic*, 2004) and collective experiences of unconscious, subconscious and paranormal activity (*Belshazzar's Feast*, 1983-4; *Dream Screens*, 1996; *PSI Girls*, 1999).

Her 2000 installation *Witness*, first shown in an abandoned chapel in London, comprised dozens of speakers hanging from the ceiling in a darkened room, each relating a different experience of alien abduction. *The Last Silent Movie*, from 2007, displayed the soundwaves created by dead or dying languages. Hiller's intention was to research and gather together the "meaningless, the banal, the unknown, even the weird and ridiculous", giving expression to things regarded as occult and arcane, and questioning the boundaries that normally keeps them in the shadows of the subconscious. A 1974 work, *Dream Mapping*, recorded the dreams that had visited Hiller and her friends over the course of three midsummer nights as they slept in "fairy rings" in Wiltshire – rings of mushrooms claimed in folklore to be portals to a spirit world – a project she described as "intensely serious and very funny". By the time of her death, Hiller's work had been collected by institutions including MoMA and the Tate, while in 2018 she had major exhibitions in Canada and Italy.

Susan Hiller, paraconceptual artist, born Tallahassee, Florida 7 Mar 1940; died London 28 Jan 2019, aged 78.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

PINS AND NEEDLES

There is a bizarre idea – dating back at least several centuries – that, should you swallow or sit on a pin, said pin can 'migrate' within your body. So, for instance, I tread barefoot on a pin and, after a couple of weeks, the pin works its way up the side of my body and out from, say, my elbow.

I know... I know... Some of these stories are utterly fantastical. For instance, a man fears ejaculating pins during sexual intercourse; or, my personal favourite, a boy swallows a needle that comes out of his grandmother's head! Sometimes, though, these tales become, instead, frighteningly real. Patients arrive at a GP's surgery claiming that a pin or needle has travelled within their body, asking doctors to remove the objects for them. Scepticism here is justified because there are those who deliberately embed pins and needles under their skin as an act of self harm. However, there is one form of bodily pin migration which at least some in the medical profession take seriously: the idea that a pin can travel through the bloodstream to the heart.

Nonsense? Well, when I was first introduced to this notion by Italian folklorist Davide Ermacora I was, to say the very least, incredulous. But Davide, in a thorough article looking at migrating pins and needles, has shaken my conceited disbelief.

PATIENTS ARRIVE
AT A GP'S SURGERY
CLAIMING THAT
A NEEDLE HAS
TRAVELLED WITHIN
THEIR BODY

Yes, it is possible that some needles in the heart are due to self insertion. There are many rooms in the mansion of self harm – we have cases on record of people hammering nails into their skull – so nothing should surprise the reader. But, courtesy of Davide, I have read several medical papers – there are many – describing how

needles have apparently travelled heartwards. I have, for instance, on my desk, both with delightful photographs: 'The story of the lost needle: Foreign body embolization to the heart' (*Journal of Cardiology Cases*, 2015) and 'Needle fragment embolism into the right ventricle' (*Wiener klinische Wochenschrift*, 2015). The first describes how a hypodermic needle had been accidentally left in the wall of the abdomen in a previous surgery and how

this needle had subsequently migrated to the heart. In the second a drug user lost a needle tip in a vein and this fragment also made its way to the heart.

Though part of me remains sceptical – in fact writing this I again scramble for 'other explanations' – it is worth emphasising that these articles were both published in respected peer-reviewed journals. I should also mention that if anyone has their own migrating pin or needle stories I would gladly pass them on to Davide for his research...

Simon Young's new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now



Alien extinction rebellion

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

ET VERSUS CLIMATE CHANGE

Who'd've thought it? Someone's come up with a new explanation for what the aliens are up to among us.

According to Dr Young-hae Chi, an instructor in Korean at Oxford University's Oriental Institute, they're not just interbreeding with us (he has read his David Jacobs), but are much concerned about climate change and nuclear weapons and all such apocalyptic stuff as that. But these aren't selfless Space Brothers arriving from the Galactic Brotherhood to bring us peace, enlightenment and vegetarianism. They're in it for themselves, and if we don't pay attention it's possible, thinks Dr Chi, that "perhaps human civilisation is coming to an end". Which isn't in the aliens' interests, since (he maintains), they're here, living among us, sharing our biosphere and, if the world is pooped, it's the end for them too. It's not entirely clear why they needed to breed human-alien hybrid offspring – but see below. It may relate to their being invisible, as Dr Chi avers they are. The presumably visible hybrids are presumably climate activists, presumably among other things, such as bakers, draughtsmen, paramedics and sanitary engineers. Should we not closely question Robin Boardman-Pattison or Greta Thunberg about this? Whatever, with prompt action on climate change, "not only can we save ourselves, but also prove aliens wrong in their judgement of our moral capacity."

Biology, ecology and the environment are not, you'll be surprised to hear, Dr Chi's official research interests. He lists those as: instructional technique in the acquisition of modern languages; Christianity in Korean religious culture; dialogue between ethics, politics, and Christianity; and North Korean refugee problems and the role of NGOs. None of which has hindered his imagination. He believes there are four types of aliens – "small; tall and bold; aliens with scales and snake eyes; and finally, insect-like aliens." The insecty ones seem to be in charge, and give orders to the lower ranks. *How does he know?*

On the puzzle of why hybrids are necessary (apart from their parents' problematic invisibility), he suggests: "One possibility is that they find our DNA valuable for the preservation of the stock. Secondly, to create species which can survive in the future climate conditions... Thirdly, some abductees report that these hybrids are of a very high intelligence, so are they producing these hybrids as a problem-



LEFT: Dr Young-hae Chi of Oxford University, making the link between alien abduction and climate change.

solver, a future leader?" Well, it wouldn't be hard to do better than the lot we've got. But while that's been the righteous cry of plebs and deplorables and intellectuals down the ages, I'm not sure putting one's trust in hypothetical hybrids would be the wisest thing to do.

Quotes above are taken from the *Oxford Student* newspaper's interview with Dr Chi, at www.oxfordstudent.com/2019/04/26/oxford-professors-theory-on-climate-change-and-alien-abduction/

ANCHORS AWEIGH, MY BOYS

The US Navy has got ufologists scuttling about pop-eyed in all directions in a manner rarely seen. Makes a change from the US Air Force getting their glands in an uproar, at least. But how so, you may enquire. By saying this:

"There have been a number of reports of unauthorized and/or unidentified aircraft entering military-controlled ranges and designated air space in recent years.

"For safety and security concerns, the Navy and the USAF take these reports very seriously and investigate each and every report. As part of this effort, the Navy is updating and formalizing the process by which reports of any such suspected intrusions can be made to the cognizant authorities. A new message to the fleet will detail the steps for reporting is in draft.

"In response to requests for information from Congressional members and staff, Navy officials have provided a series of briefings by senior Naval intelligence

officials as well as aviators who reported hazards to aviation safety."

This statement was attributed to Joseph Gradisher, a public affairs officer (rank not revealed) on the staff of Vice Admiral Matthew J Kohler, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Information Warfare. Given its vagueness, there doesn't seem much to say about it, and it's presumably what any military branch does from time to time anyway. But almost everyone in the beloved, unscrupulous media who reported on this rather bland release changed the well-known term "unauthorized and/or unidentified aircraft" to "UFOs", which aren't always the same thing, and – you may have noticed – curiously enough UFOs fail to be mentioned in the Navy statement. I suppose this translation was inevitable, in light of the hoo-ha there's been lately over the 2004 *USS Nimitz* incident, a mere 15 years ago (see **FT363:28**), and inevitably members of the To The Stars Academy were called upon to pontificate, and even more inevitably Tom DeLonge took credit for his gang having inspired the whole thing. Well, he would, wouldn't he? But there are persons of culture, taste and common sense in ufology, who have responded by saying, as anyone but the swivelled of eye and reporters desperate to titillate readers might, "Let's wait and see what this means, mmm?" To which petition I gladly append my name.

Meanwhile, it sounds nothing more spectacular than the US Navy getting on with its job, and one's glad to hear that.



A break in the clouds?

JENNY RANGLES concludes her look at the *SS Mohican* story and recalls some similar cases

Last month (**FT379:29**) I revealed new research by Paul Fuller into an extraordinary case from July 1904 first reported in *FT* in 1987 (**FT48:59-61**). A British cargo vessel, the *Mohican*, had sailed into an extraordinary glowing cloud off the US eastern seaboard that magnetised the hull and created extreme physiological effects on the crew. However, its captain denied any truth to multiple accounts featured in media on both sides of the Atlantic, sending a letter to his local paper two months later, after he arrived back in Europe, which poses the question: where did the story quoting Captain Urquhart in early August 1904 come from if he denied its reality? We have traced the story to several respected sources on both sides of the Atlantic, and they all cite Urquhart directly, quoting varying parts of what was obviously a lengthy recounting of the tale.

Paul found that the story was also relayed at second-hand to papers by the captain of the US ship *Westernland*, whose role seems key. He arrived in Ireland from Philadelphia on 16 August 1904 and told the same story that had been ascribed to Urquhart two weeks earlier, while the *Westernland* was at sea. This account features, for instance, in the *Bradford Telegraph* on 17 August as 'In a magnetic cloud'. The report is similar to the others but wrongly says it happened to the *Mohican* coming into Philadelphia on 1 August – when Urquhart was already heading for Romania. So, what was the genesis of the story? Was the captain of the *Westernland* the source of all these accounts, before and after he left Philadelphia? It would explain the gap of two weeks between coverage while he was crossing the Atlantic. Did he ascribe the strange events to the *Mohican* in error? Or perhaps invent the whole story as a joke on a fellow seaman? Paul has researched the *Westernland*. Though then operated by the American Line, it was built in Birkenhead and regularly sailed between Liverpool, Ireland and Philadelphia carrying passengers and mail; so it's quite likely that its captain and Captain Urquhart would have known one another. Interestingly, on sailing from Ireland to Liverpool after reporting the story about the *Mohican*, the *Westernland* began a transatlantic price war, cutting fares to an all-time low. Paul speculates that the ship, which had been involved in past accidents, might have used the cloud story as a way to attract publicity while implicating a rival.

Another reason for the long gap between Urquhart leaving the US on 1 August and denying the story to his local paper in mid-

September is that on 22 August he stranded the *Mohican* off Ireland; it took six days to be refloated, delaying its arrival in Romania with a cargo of coal and machinery. Two years later, Urquhart stranded another ship off Sumatra and was taken to court by naval authorities over questionable seamanship. He was temporarily stripped of his licence. Paul found him five years later as a coal merchant in Kent; I traced him again in 1939, listed as a Master Mariner (retired at 66) living in Lewisham. I found him in 1945, at the age of 71, as captain and master of the *Indrapoera* for the Royal Rotterdam Line: this was likely his last command, as he died the following year. As for the captain of the *Westernland*, Paul found no signs in his record that he would implicate another captain with malicious intent. He served as Lt Commander in the US Navy during WWI and was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross in 1920.

The interpretation of this new evidence must be left to the reader, but it is worth asking if the story of this amazing storm is unique. It is not. I had heard of cases at first hand from other witnesses. One was told to me 50 years after it happened to a young sailor at 8pm one evening in October 1928. He, too, was in the Atlantic, on a cargo ship from Europe into Miami. They were just off the US coast. The young man was reading in the ship's library when he suddenly realised how still and quiet everything had gone. Going on deck, he found that he was alone. He walked the open gangways with a view all around; he could not have missed seeing other crewman. Stranger still, the ship seemed to be suspended inside a very strange cloud: "A grey misty sheen was all around us. Everywhere I looked the sea and sky blended into one wall of seamless grey... It was exactly as if time stood still and I was no longer part of the world," he told me. He decided to stay in one spot, hoping someone would find him. After some time had passed, reality changed in an instant: he heard voices, the ship was free of the mist and the crew were asking where he had been, claiming they feared he had fallen overboard as he had been missing for an hour. No one else had seen the mist.

Another case took place on the Isle of Mull on 8 October 1981 and involved a woman called Dawn driving across the island with two American friends. As they were driving on a lovely day they slowed to view the scenery when "a mist appeared from nowhere and attached itself to our car." They instinctively ducked so the windscreen

protected them as a "thick, dark swirling mass" engulfed the vehicle. They felt a heavy pressure pushing them into their seats and there was an eerie silence. Suddenly it ended and they staggered out to find the locked boot open, its contents scattered on the road. They abandoned their planned sightseeing, with the Americans noting it was lucky the road was eerily deserted, as "nobody else will have seen this, so we don't have to tell anybody". My investigation revealed that two whole hours had vanished in what felt like a moment; none of them had noticed this anomaly until I quizzed them carefully. Another key similarity with the *Mohican* story is how power was drained from the car. It took some time to jumpstart it. Dawn was wearing a wind-up wristwatch and the two Americans new Quartz-powered digital watches; her watch worked afterwards, but both the digital ones had been completely drained. The electric clock in the car also stopped during the incident and was not working when they returned it to the hire company. They felt guilty about not mentioning it, but wondered: "How could we have explained what had happened to it?"

Another case was told to me by Martin Caidan, the author whose novel *Cyborg* inspired the TV series *The Six Million Dollar Man*. On 11 June 1986 he was piloting a Catalina Flying Boat from England to Jacksonville, Florida, alongside several skilled aviators and with state-of-the-art satellite navigation equipment. Off the Florida coast, and despite satellite images beamed to them showing no cloud within 200 miles, they were suddenly surrounded by what he called "yellowy eggnog". Worse still, all their navigation equipment went haywire, with displays showing flashing lights and gyros and compasses spinning round wildly. Time lost any meaning as they looked for a way out, but then suddenly the phenomenon ceased; and, as they circled hoping to view the magnetised cloud from the outside, there was nothing but blue sky all around. Four years later, Martin Caidan wrote the novelisation of a movie called *The Final Countdown*, in which a nuclear powered US aircraft carrier sails into an extraordinary magnetic cloud that creates mayhem on board... and then sends them back to 1941 into the heart of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

As for the mystery of what happened in 1904 to the *SS Mohican*, it will probably live forever. We may never know what, if anything, actually happened, or to whom; but at least Paul's research gives us a fighting chance of working this out. *er the*

MOONING THE FACTS: MYSTERIES OF THE APOLLO MISSIONS

It's five decades since man first set foot on the Moon – yet rather than celebrate that unique historical achievement, some prefer to focus on astronaut anomalies, unexplained sightings, and imprecise images. **BRIAN J ROBB** explores the mysteries of the Apollo missions...

Humanity first landed on the Moon 50 years ago this July. It was an epic undertaking, driven by Cold War rivalries, achieved with the kind of analogue rocketry and limited computing power that today's iPhone users would simply laugh at. The DSKY computer aboard the Eagle Lunar Module, used by US astronaut Neil Armstrong to successfully navigate to an eventual manual landing in the Sea of Tranquillity, had a total 64k memory capacity – similar to an expanded ZX-81 home computer of the early 1980s. Nonetheless, Armstrong, Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin, and Command Module pilot Michael Collins (the only one not to set foot on the Moon) managed to traverse the 238,000 miles (383,000km) from Earth to the Moon, land and conduct scientific experiments, and then return triumphantly home.

Despite that singular, historic achievement and subsequent manned missions through to 1972, as well as a thorough scientific survey of the Moon, many 'mysteries' remain, both about the Apollo missions and the Moon itself. The Moon has long fascinated mankind and remains an important part of folklore, even after exhaustive scientific research and discovery. It is approximately 1/6th the size of the Earth, and while its exact origins are still open to speculation (a rogue planetoid captured by Earth's gravity? A chunk of the Earth itself, blown off the planet?), the Moon is estimated to be around 4.6 billion years old. Hanging in the sky and visible almost every night (weather allowing), the Moon remains a great unknown, a lure for mankind, and a sign of how little we've actually advanced into space as a species, despite a plethora of unmanned probes.

It should come as no surprise that the entire 'space race' of the 1960s and early



LEFT: The crew of Apollo 8: the first humans to see the 'dark side' of the Moon. **OPPOSITE:** Buzz Aldrin walks on the surface of the Moon.

we didn't), so as to rule out the whole 'Stanley Kubrick faked the Moon landings' conspiracy (see FT332:32-36). Even putting all that aside, there are still enough anomalies – from Unidentified Flying Objects in Earth orbit and on the Moon, to apparently built structures of alien origin on the Moon's surface – to keep researchers occupied and the Luna-tic fringe obsessed.

FULL MOON

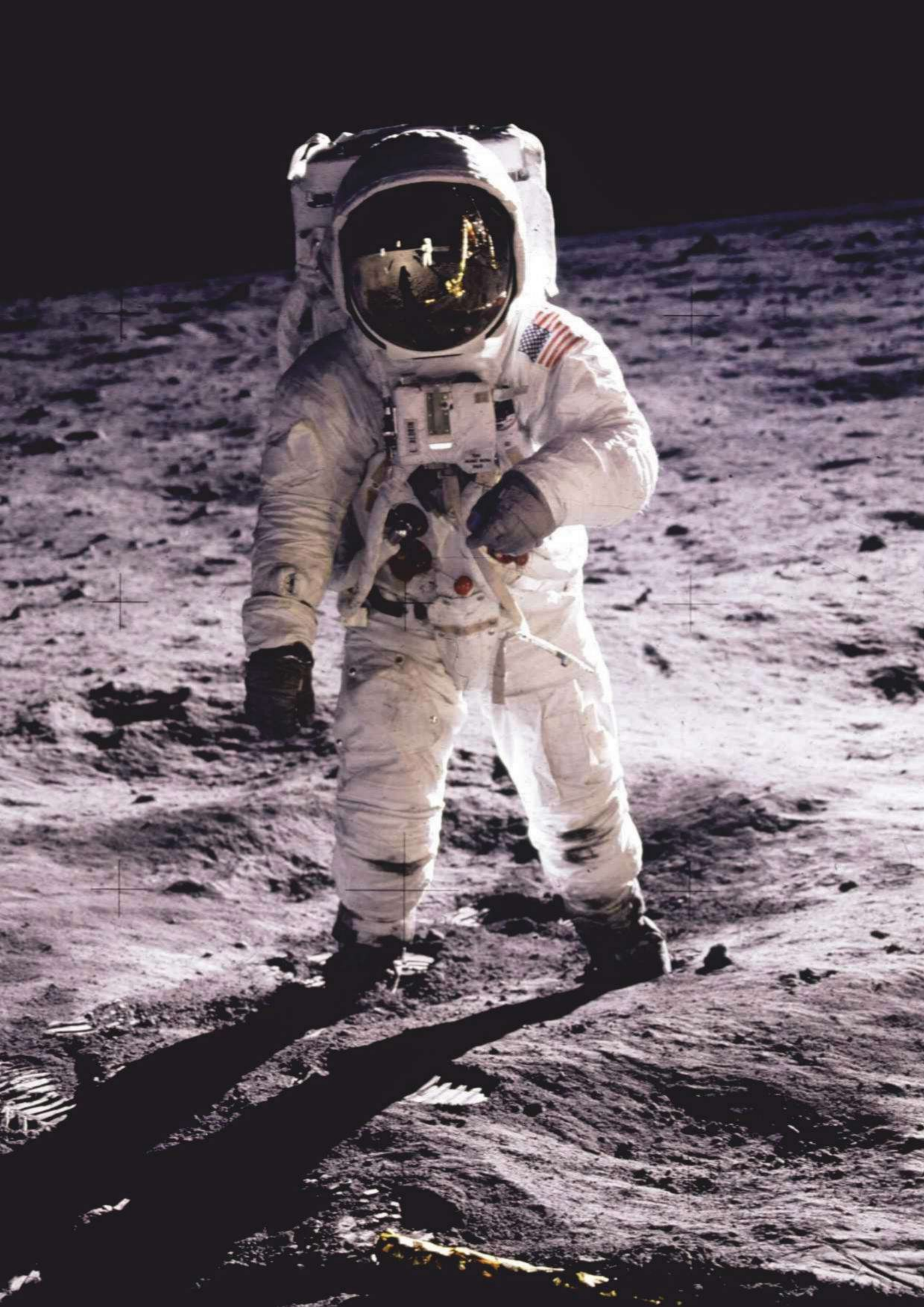
As early as Apollo 8, the second manned spaceflight of the Apollo programme, weird things were reported by the astronauts. Launched on 21 December 1968, Apollo 8 was piloted by James Lovell, commanded by Frank Borman, and carried William Anders as the Lunar Module pilot. They

were the first humans to travel beyond low Earth orbit, flying their Command Service Module in 10 lunar orbits in under 20 hours. It took Apollo 8 three whole days to reach the Moon. The trio were the first humans to see the mysterious 'dark side', and the first to see the Earth in its entirety from space: it was Anders who took the famous 1968 'Earthrise' photo that helped spark the modern mainstream environmental movement.

While travelling around the dark side of the Moon, the spacecraft was out of radio contact with Mission Control back in Houston. This was when the crew had to fire their rockets to position for Trans Earth Injection (TEI) to get them on target to return home. The Apollo 8 astronauts safely returned to Earth on 27 December 1968 and became *Time* magazine's Men of the Year. It was only later, when the 70mm photographs

*The Moon is a sign
of how little we've
advanced into
space as a species*

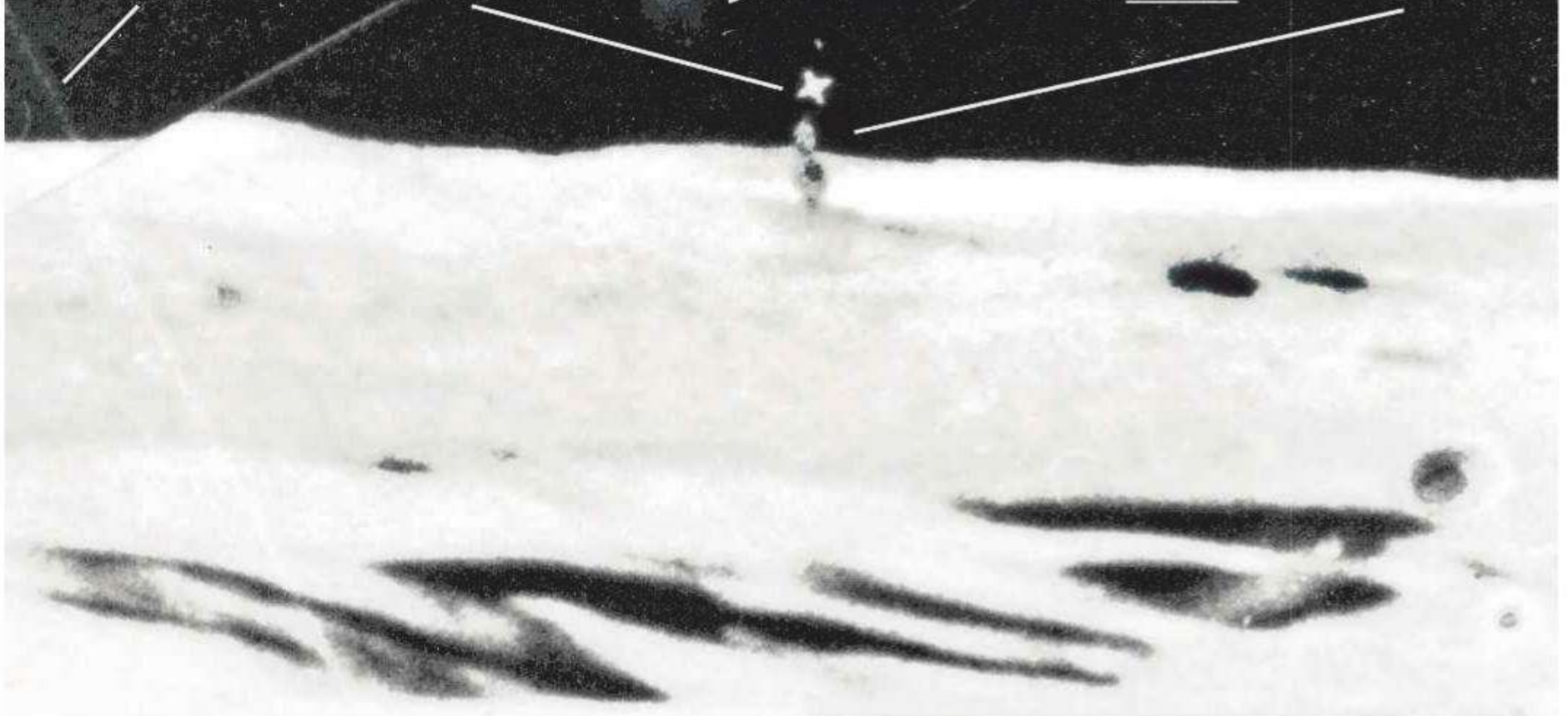
1970s, which pitted America against Soviet Russia, has proven a magnet for conspiracy theories. The Apollo missions in particular are rife with enough offbeat incidents and strange anomalies to have fuelled torrents of speculation over the past five decades. For the sake of argument, let's assume humankind actually *did* go to the Moon (see FT94:34-39, 97:22-27 for the argument that



The "Tower/Cube" and "Shard"

The straight lines in this image are film edges, produced by physically assembling the final image back on Earth; the cross-like object (right) is a photo-registration mark, placed on the Lunar Orbiter film before the spacecraft left Earth

This montage of computer-enhanced images from NASA's unmanned lunar mission -- Lunar Orbiter III -- reveal two remarkable structures on the horizon of the Moon: the 7-mile-high glass-like "Tower/Cube" (left), and the 1.5-mile-high glass-like "Shard" (right).



taken of the dark side were analysed, that an anomaly was revealed. NASA image AS08-18-2908 apparently showed a massive, triangular, almost pizza slice-shaped structure on the surface of the Moon. The image was taken after the engines had been fired for TEI, and the 'structure' only appears in this single photograph.

Were the Apollo 8 astronauts the first to encounter an alien spaceship, sneakily parked on the dark side of the Moon? Did the huge object – perhaps an alien base, rather than a spaceship – appear in only a single image thanks to a temporary fault in the 'cloaking device' that normally rendered the base invisible? The anomalous image, which had been sitting quietly on the NASA website for years, resurfaced in 2016 when it was sent anonymously to Tyler Glockner of the 'Secureteam' YouTube channel that reports on space UFO sightings. "There is something massive that appears either over or on the Moon," said Glockner. "We see this massive triangular-shaped object sitting atop the Moon. It definitely looks like a three-dimensional object, it has even got some shadowing to it. That makes me think that there is a good possibility that something, albeit briefly, appeared on the Moon." The image was taken with old-fashioned photographic film, so digital artefacts or manipulation don't apply here. Who knows? Maybe NASA's mundane explanation that the 'anomaly' was simply residue from sticking tape that was applied



to the photo could be the truth.

The anomalous Apollo 8 photograph wasn't the only 'evidence' offered for strange structures on the Moon. Former US Navy 'intelligence officer' (public records only show him as a petty officer, second class) and controversial figure in UFO circles Milton William ('Bill') Cooper (see FT59:42, 155:36-41 and p44 this issue), claimed in 1989 that he had been privy to secret intelligence that revealed US government knowledge of alien craft

ABOVE: Some of the enormous lunar 'structures' identified by Richard Hoagland. **LEFT:** The anomaly on NASA photo AS08-18-2908 – giant spaceship or residue of sticky tape?

visiting the Earth from the Moon. "LUNA is the alien base on the far side of the Moon," noted Cooper's press release. "It was seen and filmed by the Apollo astronauts. A base, a mining operation using very large machines, and the very large alien craft described in sightings reported as MOTHER SHIPS exist there."

From this, Cooper built an elaborate unified conspiracy theory taking in everything from the Kennedy assassination, the coming ice age, and the role of aliens and the Illuminati in the secret 'world government'. Even within UFO conspiracy circles Cooper was seen as a crank and 'exposed' in the pages of *UFO Magazine* in 1990. If Cooper

was on to something, he was soon silenced by the ubiquitous 'Them' when he was killed during a raid on his Arizona property by officers of the Apache County Sheriff's Office in 2001. The raid was to enforce arrest action on long-standing tax evasion charges, but Cooper opened fire, leading to a gunfight that saw him killed, aged 58.

More recent photo evidence came from US Navy satellite Clementine from 1994. The probe spent two months photographing the Moon's surface, returning 1.8 million



ABOVE: Conspiracy theorist Bill Cooper claimed the Government knew of an alien base on the Moon. **BELOW:** Astronaut Gordon Cooper (no relation) was a firm believer in UFOs and alien contact: "There are thousands of witness reports and a quantity of documents to prove this, but nobody wants to make them public."

images. Of those, 'only' 170,000 were ultimately made public. There could be all sorts of reasons for that, but naturally the proportionally low figure led to cries of "Cover-up!" Of the Clementine images, the UFO Casebook website claimed: "There is a HUGE alien Moon base complex on the far side of the Moon. This sounds silly, but it is true and we have solid proof... straight from the military." The Clementine photos were said to reveal "large domes", obviously more proof of alien activity on Earth's nearest natural satellite. However, NASA's images are often made up of many, overlapping, smaller images (hence the high number of photos) and some areas can 'reveal' apparent artefacts due to low quality visual data or poor overlapping of the images.

Clementine wasn't the first Moon probe to take photos of strange anomalies. The Lunar Orbiter programme of five probes that surveyed the Moon between 1966 and 1967 was intended to map the surface in order to help the Apollo missions find potential landing sites. All sorts of weird images emerged, such as an odd 'bottle', a 'flat platform', and strange 'lights'. One image – a tall, black blur – was labelled 'the shard' by arch-conspiracist Richard Hoagland, claiming it showed a tower seven miles high (see **FT123:49**,). Hoagland 'revealed' the image through enhanced digital manipulation of an original that simply showed a 'dot'. Alternatively, it could be gas emissions or ejecta from a meteorite impact, but that

Richard Hoagland claimed the image showed a tower seven miles high



would spoil Hoagland's morning. Another photo taken during the Apollo missions showed an out-of-focus triangular shape with a tall spire that Hoagland dubbed 'the castle', claiming it to be an 'ancient building'.

US Air Force 'whistleblower' Karl Wolfe, who worked for three decades at Langley Field, Virginia, claimed that data from NASA's Lunar Orbiter Project showed 'structures' on the dark side of the Moon. "They were definitely not created by natural means, such as meteors... The structures were created by intelligent beings. [It was] a base on the back side of the Moon," quoted the *Daily Express* in 2016, drawing upon an interview with Wolfe from the 1990s. "I could clearly make out geometric shapes, well organised, and well designed. Most noticeable were what looked exactly like radar antennas, very similar to what one could see on Earth. [These were] structures made by intelligent beings on the Moon. I was not supposed to see these photographs!"

Much of this is, of course, can be put down to pareidolia – a psychological phenomenon that causes people to see patterns in random stimuli, often but not exclusively applying human characteristics to inanimate objects. Falling into this category is the photo taken by an Apollo astronaut of a 'cylinder' embedded in the surface of the Moon. Fuzzy and out-of-focus, the thing certainly looks like a discarded

soda can or oil can, but it is difficult to tell the scale. More prosaically, it's probably simply a rock that looks vaguely cylindrical – the treacherous human brain does the rest. Richard Hoagland, please take note...

Perhaps even more outré were the claims made by infamous remote viewer Ingo Swann. Tasked by US government agent 'Axelrod' to psychically probe the Moon, Swann claimed to have encountered an extraterrestrial presence. He followed "tractor tread marks" that led him to visualise "intelligent activity and structures". Writing about Swann's astral Mooning in *American Chronicle* magazine, Gary S Bekkum noted: "In the depths of a crater he viewed... a base on the Moon. He had been inducted into an interplanetary operation by the need to monitor extraterrestrial activities. Swann decided Axelrod [was] psychically spying on the alien Moon base because the extraterrestrials had been less than friendly. Ingo sensed that he had been psychically 'spotted' by two of the humanoid-looking inhabitants, [and] he questioned whether or not he was at risk." (For more on claims of alien life on the Moon, see Peter Grego, 'Alien Moon', **FT112:26-29**.)

ANCIENT ASTRONAUTS

With a seeming plethora of mysterious structures on the Moon, it will come as no surprise that Earth's only satellite is also a hotspot for visits by aliens. Throughout the Apollo programme there were various reported sightings of strange craft attributed to non-human entities. What better witnesses could there be than Buzz Aldrin, Lunar Module co-pilot and the second man to set foot on the Moon? On the third day of their flight, Commander Neil Armstrong requested confirmation of the location of the jettisoned Saturn V (S-IVB) booster rocket that launched them on their historic voyage. Mission Control were quick to answer: "Apollo 11, Houston. The S-IVB is about 6,000 nautical miles from you now. Over." To that, Armstrong responded with a clipped: "Okay. Thank you."

That seemingly innocuous query and response was enough for an entire mythology to be built up about Apollo 11 sighting a UFO *en route* to the Moon. The scuttlebutt among UFO enthusiasts was that Aldrin had spotted a strange object during Apollo 11's flight, one that dogged the mission for days. "There was something out there that was close enough to be observed... what could it be?" said Aldrin of the L-shaped object he freely admitted seeing, recounting the incident on the 2006 documentary *Apollo 11: The Untold Story*. Having questioned Mission Control over one possible explanation – the Saturn V booster – the crew decided not to pursue the matter. There were bigger issues at stake. "Who knows?" mused Aldrin, "Somebody could have demanded we turn back



NASA

TOP: Remote viewer Ingo Swann visualised traces of alien activity on the Moon. **ABOVE CENTRE:** An abandoned alien soda can? **ABOVE:** The Guyot Crater anomaly, claimed by some to be a huge alien spaceship.

MORE MOON MYSTERIES

NASA'S 'MISSING' MOON TAPES

NASA has a poor reputation for conservation of historic data. Last summer a batch of 'missing' tapes from the 1969 Moon landings were re-examined in order to determine whether the surface had warmed up since the Apollo missions. During Apollo 15 and 17 in 1971 and 1972, measurements were taken of the Moon's surface temperature. The data were stored on magnetic tape, but much of it was not properly archived and presumed lost. Starting in 2010, a team of academics spent eight years tracking down the tapes and performing data recovery on the decaying storage material in order to retrieve the information. The conclusion was that the astronauts themselves had disturbed the surface layer of the Moon, exposing the darker undersoil that absorbed more light from the Sun, so heating up the surface.

A further example of NASA's seeming carelessness with data tapes came in 2015. A batch of 325 magnetic tapes labelled as belonging to NASA was discovered in the basement of a dead man in Pennsylvania, along with two giant analogue computers. A scrap metal dealer clearing the house reported the find. According to the labels, at least some of the tapes related to earlier Pioneer missions, while others were data from weather satellites. NASA specialists spent five months analysing the tapes and attempting data recovery, before destroying the originals. It is unclear what data was recovered and whether it was of any significance, with NASA dismissing the tapes as merely back-up copies "of no intrinsic or informational value to the agency". How they, along with the computers, ended up in a Pennsylvania basement remains a mystery.

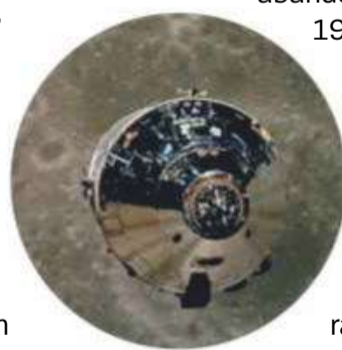
Worst of all for NASA was the 2006 admission that the agency had wiped the original tapes from the Apollo mission of July 1969. A search was mounted so the footage could be used in a new television programme, but it was discovered that the Apollo tapes were among the 200,000 magnetic storage tapes wiped and re-used by NASA, due to the then expensive nature of the tape (the same excuse was used for the junking of many British television programmes of the 1960s). Copies of the material were retrieved from the archives of CBS Television, while kinescopes (Super 8 film recordings from Australia) of the television coverage was located in NASA's Johnson Space Center vaults. Lowry Digital, better known



for restoring old Hollywood movies, was contracted to restore the available Apollo footage. This sparked a conspiracy theory that Hollywood continued to be involved in the falsifying of the Moon landing right into the 21st century. "The conspiracy theorists are going to believe what they are going to believe," noted Lowry Digital Chief Operating Officer Mike Inchalik.

MUSIC TO AN ASTRONAUT'S EARS

The crew of Apollo 10 – Gene Cernan, Tom Stafford, and John Young – heard what they dubbed 'Moon music' while travelling across the far side. For about an hour, the astronauts were out of contact with Earth, but instead they heard 'unearthly' sounds. Transcript of the astronauts' conversation remained classified in the NASA archives until 2008. "The music sounds 'outer-spacey', doesn't it," says one astronaut. "You hear that? That whistling sound? Well, that sure is weird music." After about an hour, the 'music' stopped. Prior to reconnecting with Mission Control at Houston, the astronauts discussed whether to mention the weird sounds they'd picked up over their radio. An audio recording of the flight reveals astronaut John Young asking: "Shall we tell them about it?" Gene Cernan then replies: "I don't know. We ought to think about it." The 'space music' remained a mystery until the Cassini spacecraft picked up similar sounds from Saturn. The sounds, picked up as radio waves, were caused by charged particles moving through Saturn's magnetic atmosphere – but the Moon lacks both atmosphere and magnetic field. The eventual explanation was put down to cross-interference from the Apollo spacecraft's own radio systems. While Stafford and Cernan were in the Lunar Module, Young remained in the Command



Module; both vehicles had their own active radio systems. The issue was never publicly discussed by the astronauts.

SPACESHIP MOON

The Hollow Earth theory is well-known, but what about the Hollow Moon? In 1970, two Russian scientists, Michael Vasin and Alexander Shcherbakov of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, published a paper titled "Is the Moon the Creation of Alien Intelligence?", which suggested that "The Moon is an artificial satellite put into orbit around the Earth by intelligent beings". Based on measurements of the depth of visible craters, they concluded the shell was only two-and-a-half miles (4km) thick and the interior was hollow. NASA scientists were reported as claiming that the Moon "rang like a bell" for hours after the deliberate crashing of Apollo 12's ascent stage, suggesting it might be hollow. Seismometers installed on the Moon by astronauts recorded 'moonquakes' between 1972 and 1977. The Moon's lesser density than Earth has been put forward as evidence both that it is hollow and as a cause of the moonquakes.

Essentially, in modern pop cultural terms, the Moon is the Death Star from the *Star Wars* films. The theory is that this spaceship Moon contains ancient extraterrestrials whose job it is to monitor the Earth and note the technological progress of humanity. It might also provide an explanation as to why the US abandoned the Moon missions in 1972 – were they warned away by its alien inhabitants?

The first mention of a hollow Moon actually comes in science fiction with HG Wells's 1901 novel *The First Men in the Moon*, so it is hardly a new idea. Others ran with it, including Edgar Rice Burroughs (in 1926's *The Moon Maid*), Isaac Asimov (in 1986's *Foundation and Earth*), and David Weber (in 2003's *Empire from the Ashes*, which postulates the Moon is an alien spaceship put into Earth orbit 50,000 years ago). Additionally, the hollow Moon is a favourite topic of former goalkeeper turned conspiracy guru David Icke, who believes that it is from there that reptilian aliens monitor and influence human thought. In an infamous episode of *Doctor Who* starring Peter Capaldi, the Moon was revealed to be a giant egg which then hatched into a huge 'space dragon'.



LEFT: Buzz Aldrin, despite a reported close encounter, remains a keen advocate of space exploration. **BELOW:** Apollo 15 astronaut Al Worden shared his ancient astronaut theories on *Good Morning Britain* in 2017.

MAGNIFICENT DESOLATION

Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on another world, died in 2012 of heart failure, aged 82; the secrets of what he may have seen on the surface of the Moon died with him. Armstrong, a notoriously taciturn and emotionally-controlled man (as seen in Ryan Gosling's icy portrayal in the 2018 movie *First Man*) didn't talk much on the record, beyond mandated NASA duties, about his unique experiences. Armstrong claimed he took the post-fame experiences of aviator Charles Lindberg as a cautionary tale. That silence, of course, left a vacuum that could be filled by rampant speculation, informed extrapolation, and downright fakery.

A prime example of the latter was the work of science fiction author Otto Binder, who died in 1974. Binder wrote the original Captain Marvel (now Shazam!) strips published by Fawcett Comics. He also wrote comics for DC and Marvel, and penned pulp fiction for *Amazing Stories* and others under the pen name Eando Binder (teamed with his brother, Jack). Binder was a proponent of the 'ancient astronauts' theory, and like Al Worden he believed humankind was descended from or had crossbred with aliens. Posing as a "former NASA insider", Binder thought it'd be fun to claim that radio hams had picked up transmissions by Armstrong from the Moon, uncensored by NASA, in which the astronaut described an alien lunar city, concluding with Armstrong's outburst: "They're on the Moon, watching us!" Of course, there were no censored transmissions, and many amateur radio receivers based on Earth were able to follow the NASA transmissions in real time. Despite that, Binder's rather transparent hoax was good enough for Timothy Good to include it as fact in his 1987 book *Above Top Secret*.

There was, however, one curious moment of verifiable radio silence shortly after Armstrong took his historic first step. The astronauts were equipped with a separate, private medical channel to talk to a doctor at Mission Control in Houston. Anything said across this channel was not broadcast live as part of the international coverage of the landing. For two minutes, Neil Armstrong cut his public feed. "What happened during those two minutes has been the subject of a lot of controversy," claimed Dr Michael Salla, author of *Exopolitics: Political Implications of the Extraterrestrial Presence* (2004). Among the things claimed for this private two-minute chat are Armstrong's sighting of extraterrestrial objects on the Moon,

one of the first seven American astronauts who were part of the initial Project Mercury manned test flights that established the way for Apollo. Cooper was a long-term believer in aliens and UFOs, dating back to before his NASA experience. Cooper told an interviewer: "Every day, in the USA, our radar instruments capture objects of form and composition unknown to us. And there are thousands of witness reports and a quantity of documents to prove this, but nobody wants to make them public." Worden was the Command Service Module pilot for 1971's Apollo 15, so never walked on the Moon. On *Good Morning Britain* in 2017, the then 87-year-old Worden outlined his belief that humans were descended from aliens. Lunar Module pilot Edgar Mitchell, who spent nine hours on the Moon's surface, claimed that 90 per cent of UFO sightings were "visitors from other planets". He said the evidence for human-alien encounters was "very strong" but had been "classified" by governments around the world. "We all know that UFOs are real," Mitchell said on one TV show, "the question is where they come from..."

Astronauts, like pilots, are viewed as well-trained, reliable witnesses, so their claims of sightings of strange craft, whether in Earth's skies, in orbit, or even on the way to the Moon, tend to be taken a bit more seriously than those of the average mid-Westerner who claims to have been intimately probed. Before Apollo, there had been other reports from astronauts of strange sightings. Gemini 4 pilot Jim McDivitt claimed in 1965 to have seen (while his co-pilot Ed White slept) a "white cylindrical shape" in Earth orbit that was explained away as being the Titan II second-stage launch rocket. The same year's Gemini 7 flight saw the excited astronauts refer to a bogey (military slang for an "unidentified aircraft, suspected to be hostile") that inevitably came to be interpreted as a



UFO. This, too, was dismissed as "booster-associated debris" by space specialist journalist James Oberg, who regularly debunked UFO reports on behalf of NASA (see **FT168:32-39**), although astronaut James Lovell claimed the bogey was in addition to visible booster debris.

In 1970, Robert F Allnut, NASA's Assistant Administrator for Legislative Affairs, noted that "after 15 years of manned space voyages, including space stations and landing on the Moon, spacemen have brought back not a shred of evidence of extraterrestrial spacecraft, or UFOs." The part of the voice analysis of Aldrin that the *Daily Star* ignored was the conclusion that, as he could not explain what he saw, he "therefore thinks he should be doubted". Aldrin later went further, denying he'd seen a flying saucer and offering up an alternative explanation. He concluded he must have seen one of four panels that separated from S-IVB and that was heading on the same trajectory towards the Moon. The Sun glinting on the panel caught Aldrin's attention and gave the impression of being an "L-shaped" object. Aldrin came out fighting in 2002 when a heckler accused him of being involved in faking the Moon landings, landing a punch right on his kisser (see **FT168:2**), so probably best not to ask him about aliens.



ABOVE LEFT: 'Mona Lisa', the hibernating female alien supposedly brought back by the 'secret' Apollo 20 lunar mission, as revealed by videos posted to the Internet. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The 2011 film *Apollo 18* revisited the idea of a NASA conspiracy to cover-up the existence of alien life on the Moon.

including several flying saucers parked along a crater's edge. The dour demeanour of the triumphant astronauts upon their return to Earth is also held up as proof that something they'd seen on the Moon had chastened them.

BEYOND APOLLO

Apollo 17 in 1972 saw the final (to date) manned landing on the Moon, although it wasn't planned as such. NASA intended to continue the flights right through to Apollo 20 when US President Nixon pulled the funding and effectively closed down the manned space flight programme (he had initially wanted to abandon Apollo 16 and 17, too) until the launch of the Space Shuttle in the early 1980s. There was never a landing on the dark side of the Moon. However, there are those who believe the Apollo programme did *not* end with Apollo 17.

NASA focused on near-Earth orbit activities, including Skylab in the mid-1970s (the Saturn V rocket earmarked for Apollo 20 was repurposed for it), the Apollo-Soyuz joint project of 1975, and, much later, the International Space Station. Former NASA engineer John Schuessler claimed the Apollo programme ended as "they'd accomplished everything they were trying to do. Apollo was proof that the United States was a leader in technology in space. That was the big gain. There [was] always a shortage of money. Plus, there was a shortage of political support."

In April 2007, new impetus was added to the theory that there had been 'secret' missions after Apollo when a series of YouTube videos purportedly from the 'secret' Apollo 20 mission were posted by a user with the ID 'retiredafb'. The following month, an Italian ufologist posted an interview with prospective Apollo 20 astronaut "William Rutledge". According

to Rutledge, the mission brief for Apollo 20 was to explore the polar regions of the Moon, to visit the dark side, and to investigate a "miles long" alien spacecraft. The mission launched in August 1976 and was a joint project with the Soviet Union. The other two astronauts were reported to be American Leona Snyder and Soviet cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov, the first man to walk in space in 1965. Most explosively, the claim was made that the mission had brought back to Earth a hibernating, female alien humanoid, dubbed 'Mona Lisa'.

Perhaps intended initially as an April Fool's joke, the videos connected to the Apollo 20 mission proliferated, spreading across the Internet, with new ones being added sporadically from a variety of sources. If, as is most likely, it was a spoof, no one has come forward to take responsibility, although French sculptor Thierry Speth laid claim to the hoax in a 2007 Internet posting, but others took issue with this. A great deal of ingenuity and skill went into creating the short videos, using genuine NASA images (from earlier Apollo missions) as a starting point. Interior shots of the Apollo spacecraft are perfect matches for the real thing. A fake Apollo 20 mission patch, in the tradition of the US lunar missions, was also created. The waters were further muddied by the release in 2011 of the 'found footage' movie *Apollo 18*, which purported to draw upon suppressed NASA footage that chronicled mankind's encounter with aliens on the Moon.

FOR ALL MANKIND

A return to the Moon is long overdue. Only 12 humans have walked on another world, and those still alive to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first landing – Buzz Aldrin, 89; David Scott, 86; Charles Duke, 83; Harrison Schmitt, 83 – are all getting on a bit. In 2005, a NASA report estimated

that a return to the Moon would cost \$104 billion; today, that would be \$133 billion (the entire Apollo programme cost an estimated \$120 billion, in today's dollars). NASA's current annual budget – to cover all activities, including space telescopes, probes to Mars, Jupiter, and the outer edge of the Solar System – is less than \$20 billion. In 2004, the Bush administration pushed for a return to the Moon. NASA spent \$9 billion over five years developing the Orion spacecraft, a spin-off from the Space Shuttle, capable of landing on the Moon, only for incoming President Obama to scrap the venture. Subsequent administrations have set their eyes on Mars instead, considering the Moon to be a case of "been there, done that".

A return to the Moon, though, could be the ideal training ground for a longer, more permanent manned mission to Mars. It would also allow the myths and legends about alien bases on the Moon that grew in the wake of the triumphant Apollo missions to be laid to rest. Humanity is a strange species; rather than revelling in the glorious achievement of sending men to the Moon, especially given the limitations of 1960s technology, some prefer to invent imaginary flying saucers and alien bases. As James Oberg notes: "A well-publicised collection of cranks, crackpots, con men and well-meaning innocents have created a facade of 'UFO encounters' and a counterfeit claim of 'NASA cover-up' concerning UFOs allegedly seen on the Apollo 11 Moon expedition." Perhaps travelling to the Moon told us more about the nature of mankind than about the nature of our nearest planetary body.

◆ **BRIAN J ROBB** is a founding editor of Sci-Fi Bulletin and a regular contributor to FT whose books include *Counterfeit Worlds*: Philip K Dick on Film, and *Timeless Adventures*: How Doctor Who Conquered TV.

THE MAN FROM THE MINISTRY

DAVID CLARKE spoke to fellow FT contributor **ANDREW MAY** about his time as a scientific advisor for the Ministry of Defence, and asked him about his run-ins with Top Secret projects, alien technology, Defence Intelligence spooks and the MoD's 'UAP project'



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

ABOVE: The main Ministry of Defence building in Whitehall, where Andrew May worked between 1996 and 1998 on 'blue sky' projects. **BELOW:** Andrew May.

Since the release of the British Ministry of Defence's Condn report on 'Unidentified Aerial Phenomena' there has been much speculation about how far the intelligence community was (and is) immersed in secret UAP-related research. One of the documents obtained by David Clarke under FOI and published in these pages (**FT368:29**) caught the attention of regular *FT* contributor Andrew May... because it referred to him during his time as a scientific advisor with the MoD. This happy coincidence led Dave to interview Andrew about his time working on 'blue-sky' projects for the MoD, from exotic propulsion technologies to antigravity technology...

DC: Thanks for talking to me Andrew. First



of all, I understand your job at the MoD occasionally brought you into contact with Defence Intelligence officials, a few years before the Condn report was commissioned. What do you remember about that time?

AM: Well, my memory was jogged by the DI memo you printed in *FT* last year. I was surprised to see it referred to DSc(Air) TG3 – in other words, the desk officer in the Directorate of Science (Air) responsible for Technology Group 3 – because that was me at the time! TG3 was the part of MoD's 'blue skies' research that dealt with advanced aerodynamic and propulsion technologies, and it was my job to keep track of what was going on in those areas. I was there from 1996 to 1998, and the memo is dated April 1997. It refers to a meeting that a DI official had

COURTESY ANDREW MAY

with myself and my counterpart in TG9, whose remit was similar to mine but on electromagnetic technologies.

I was astonished to see ‘UFO/UAP’ in the memo’s subject line, because the meeting certainly wasn’t presented to us in that context. If it had been, I’m sure I’d remember it, and I don’t. Reading the memo, which is an internal DI document I didn’t see at the time, it sounds completely routine – stating the bleeding obvious, in fact. It says we were “interested in any novel technologies which might be useful for their programmes” – a phrase that was quoted by the *Times* (2 July 2018) when they reported the same memo under the headline “Truth is out there on Britain’s 50-year quest to catch a UFO”. But from my point of view, it was nothing to do with UFOs in the extraterrestrial sense – just experimental technology from other countries that DI happened to be keeping an eye on.

DC: Many UFO proponents believe there was some kind of cover-up going on, or that the whole study was part of a ‘whitewash’, and/or the author never had access to the ‘best’ material. What are your thoughts on these ideas?

AM: That’s not something I’ve got any inside knowledge on. The research I was involved with wasn’t highly classified – the same sort of thing that goes on quite openly in universities – so I only had a standard-level security clearance. Obviously, a UFO believer would say I didn’t have a ‘need to know’ the real facts – and there must be some truth in that, since I now know that a meeting I was at, which I didn’t associate with UFOs at the time, ended up in a file labelled UFO/UAP.

Having said that, one of my claims to fame is that my office – in the main MoD building in Whitehall – was almost directly below Nick Pope’s, several floors above me. But his department, which was basically concerned with PR, had virtually no dealings with the one I worked in. I can only recall one occasion when they asked me to comment on a letter someone had sent their MP inquiring about the alien spaceships the Americans supposedly kept at Area 51. I replied quite truthfully that I had no information on that subject!

DC: What do you recall about discussions you must have had with other desk officers and colleagues on the subject of UFOs and related fortean topics at the time? Did they take these subjects seriously? The impression given by the documents is there was a lot of compartmentalisation of knowledge and competition for scarce resources, as opposed to



LEFT: Contact in Red Square – Andrew May (left foreground) talking to a Russian aeronautical scientist in front of Lenin’s tomb in Moscow in 1996. **BELOW:** Project Greenglow was a study of antigravity.

the party line, and they stick to it whether they like it or not, because they know they’ll lose their jobs otherwise. But MoD doesn’t work like that – or it didn’t when I was there. It’s made up of hundreds of small teams, all virtually autonomous and essentially competing with each other. The idea that there’s a single Illuminati-style agenda is laughable if you’ve ever worked there.

And, as incredible as it’s going to sound to conspiracy theorists, MoD staff are just ordinary humans like anyone else. They watch TV – and at the time we’re talking about, the *X-Files* was one of

the biggest shows there was. So, of course, people talked about things like aliens, and made jokes about them – but I don’t remember anyone taking them seriously. Several RAF aircrew were convinced they’d seen strange things in the sky – but they assumed they were American spyplanes, not extraterrestrial spacecraft.

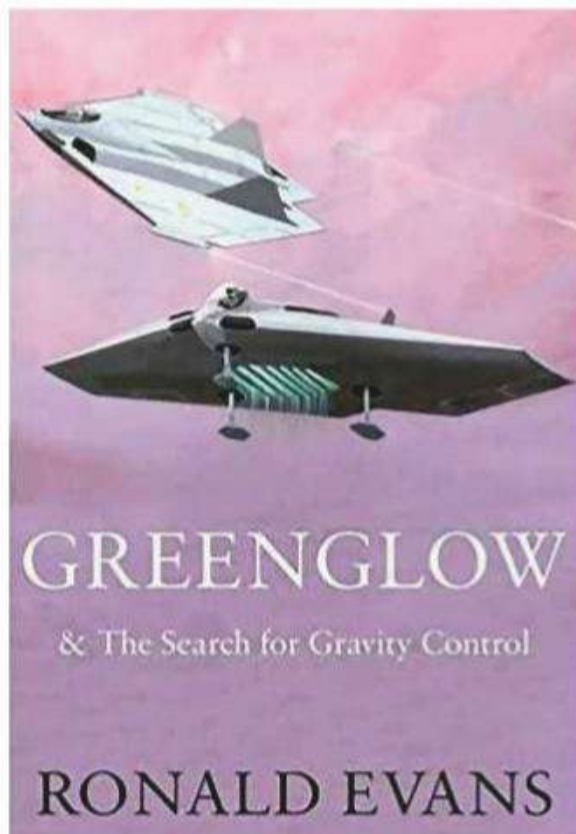
DC: Did you ever liaise with foreign scientists or defence officials on these subjects?

AM: Well, I had one visit to the Pentagon, where I gave a presentation on Eurofighter – that would have been several years before the plane went into service. Actually, it was someone else’s presentation, but trips to Washington were considered so dull that the new boy got the chore of giving it! At a more interesting level, one of the most innovative of the TG3 projects involved a collaboration with some Russian scientists, so I got a trip to Moscow out of that. I’m not sure if I’m allowed to say what it was about, so I won’t – except that it had nothing to do with aliens. But one of the Russian scientists did have a distinctly fortean sideline in ball lightning research.

DC: Can you tell us any more about the ‘blue sky’ projects you worked on at this time?

AM: You’d be bored by most of it! By and large it was the sort of thing that’s of great interest to sci-tech geeks and no one else. But there was one notable exception. I was one of a handful of MoD scientists who took an interest in the BAE Systems ‘Project Greenglow’ study into – well, antigravity, to put it bluntly. The high point for me was a visit to Sheffield University to see a (sadly unsuccessful) attempt to reproduce Eugene

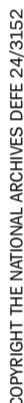
People talked about things like aliens, and made jokes about them



serious concern as the ufologists allege. Is this a fair assessment?

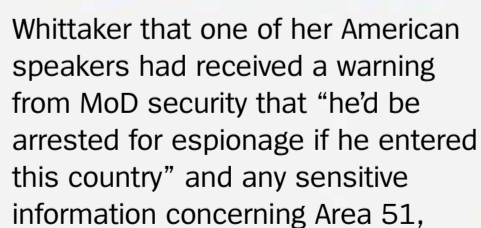
AM: Yes, that’s pretty much the way it was. I’ve worked in private companies, very large ones, where everyone acts like they’re playing for the same team – they listen to the man or woman at the top, they understand

Dave Clarke finds some surprises in newly declassified MoD files




BELOW: UFO conspiracy theorist Bill Cooper and the cover of *Behold a Pale Horse*. He was a speaker at a 1993 'Global Deception' conference in London.

Hidden among hundreds of UFO papers released under FOI is a memo from a DI officer who highlights a *Fortean Times* interview with West Midlands conspiracy researcher Mary Seal. She was involved in the promotion of the First Global Deception conference, held in Wembley, London, in January 1993 (**FT68:30-33**). One of the keynote speakers was the late Bill Cooper, who claimed to have seen secret documents, while serving in the US Navy, that described government contacts with aliens. Seal told interviewer Simon



I was surprised that Cooper's far-fetched alien and conspiracy stories, summarised in his book *Behold a Pale Horse* (1991), were taken seriously by some elements of the intelligence community in the UK. But at the time the *FT* interview was copied by the Assistant Director of DI51 – a branch that specialised in covert intelligence



gathering by electronic means –
to the MoD's Director General
of Scientific and Technical
Intelligence (DGSTI). This
is a civilian post that is
equivalent in military rank
to a two-star general. In
his note, DI51 says he
is “interested in a
range of topics
which are
difficult to
explain

by conventional scientific means. Some of the issues discussed in this [FT] article fall within this category". He was concerned about the specific allegations made by Mary Seal concerning Area 51 and posed a question: "Presumably this can be confirmed or denied".

In his hand-written response the DI55 desk officer says he remained sceptical but suggested the allegations should be referred to another branch staffed by Naval Intelligence. He also said "a contractor" could be tasked to attend another conference, organised by the Independent UFO Network (IUN), at Sheffield Hallam University in August 1993. This was because "the attendance of DIS officers at open conferences is not permissible", but the contractor, a retired DI officer, could obtain copies of the conference papers under cover of his civilian status. I was a member of the IUN and was involved in the organisation of the conference. But I had no idea that I was sharing a lecture theatre with the man who would, three years later, begin work on the MoD's definitive report on UFOs. Among the speakers in Sheffield that summer weekend were FT columnist Jenny Randles, Paul Devereux and Hilary Evans from the UK and, from the US, Budd Hopkins and conspiracy theorist Linda Moulton Howe. The released files don't reveal what the DIS spy learned, but volume 2 of his Condign report draws heavily upon Devereux's work on earthlights and list several of Jenny's books on UFOs as references.

Another missive in the same file, written by the DI55 UFO desk officer in response to the flurry of memos that followed, notes that ufology consists of "many serious UFO research organisations operated by lay persons, scientists and engineers" who were determined to employ their skills to solve genuine mysteries. I took that as a reference to my colleagues and fellow FT contributors. But there was also "a lunatic fringe", and he believed Seal, Cooper and others involved in conspiracy subculture were members of this group.

The author, an RAF Wing Commander, adds: "Over the years DI55 has been described as a 'secret army' that defends Earth from aliens and as an organisation that assassinates people that get to [sic] close to 'the secret'! To my knowledge there is no other intelligence agency in the UK that covers UFOs and the accusation [made by Seal in *Fortean Times*] is amusing but false".

HEAD TO HEAD

THEM & US

"I may be paranoid, but am I paranoid enough?"

SIMON WHITTAKER talks to MARY SEAL, conspiracy researcher

Mary Seal, a former public relations officer aged 48, shot to media prominence by organising the First International Conference That Exposes A Global Deception, held at Wembley over the weekend of 9-10 January. The hall was paid for by Mary and her partner Keith Mears and guest speakers were flown in from America and Europe.

Although there are many researchers delving into the mad, the bad and the dangerous to know, Mary Seal is a rarity in attempting to weave the many different strands together into a consistent and apocalyptic worldview, one too rich for English publishers to stomach, judging by the reception of the manuscript outlining her theories. FT spoke to Mary in her suburban home on the outskirts of Birmingham.



FT: Who are you and where are you from?
MS: I'm just a normal person who started researching a long time ago. What set me off was a UFO sighting when I was about 18 or 19. It was so clear during daytime and there was no doubt that it was a physical object – nothing hazy or paranormal about it.

FT: Was it in this country?
MS: Yes, in Aldridge, near Walsall. I was sitting in a car, not thinking about anything and I looked up to see this huge Mothership type affair; and I thought: "My God, I'm going to get someone else to look at this with me." I was about to get out of the car and I realised I'd been made to look up. Out of it came three discs, much darker than the coppery-coloured Mothership. They got up to a certain height then shot off. I'd never considered UFOs before, but after that I started thinking things weren't as they appeared and began reading into a variety of fields.

FT: Just to get a grasp on your worldview, what do you think UFOs are?
MS: Well, they're man-made machines, undoubtedly. Advanced technology kept secret by Government. They pretend free energy is a Utopian dream because it wouldn't do for people to stop using petrol. I would have thought that was obvious to anyone. Go to America and talk to top scientists and they'll tell you quite openly what can be done. Getting them to come over and say it on a stage is a different matter. It can be proved the Nazis had this technology. In the Public Records Office there's quite a few documents that have been sealed for years, newspaper clippings and scientific reports. Nazi anti-gravity is one of the best-kept secrets of the last war.

FT: How did this lead to your conference?
MS: I had so much information and stuff on UFOs, but most of it came

30 Fortean Times 68

ABOVE: Mary Seal was the subject of this 1993 FT article attached to the DI memo on the facing page.

Podkletnov's gravity screening experiment [FT163:28]. I also met a few people from the other side of the Atlantic who were involved in NASA's Breakthrough Physics Propulsion project. But it was just a 'watching brief', and I'm not aware of MOD doing any research of its own in this area.

Anyway, the fact that MoD showed an interest in certain way-out technologies doesn't mean that such technologies are practical, or even possible within the laws of physics. But the potential payoff, if they could be made to work, is so enormous it would be remiss not to look at them. In the same category, there were those experiments on remote viewing that DI did in 2001 [FT122:5]. That was after I'd moved on to another job, so I only know about them from your book *Britain's X-traordinary Files* (2014). Based on what you wrote there, it sounds like nothing came of that one either.

DC: Among all the hundreds of pages that were

released following my FOI requests was some intriguing correspondence between the civilian UFO desk officers and the Defence Intelligence people about UFO conferences. It suggested that DI officers attended the BUFORA conference held at Sheffield Hallam University in 1997 and also one of the FT UnCons around the same time. Is there any truth in this and if so, what were they interested in?

AM: Actually, I can help you out there. I went to the UnCon in April 1997 (coincidentally the same month as the memo we kicked off with) – purely because I've always been an avid FT fan, nothing to do with business. I met a chap from DI there, and we sat together for several of the talks – most of them, as it happens, about UFOs. The speakers, if I remember correctly, were Philip Klass, Jenny Randles and Paul Devereux. I assumed that, like me, the DI guy wasn't there on official business – but I've been wrong before. So, draw your own conclusions!

FREAKS AND FAKES

ALEXIS TURNER presents a taxidermist's eye view of the teratological landscape – separating the fake siamese sheep from the genuinely deformed goats – and traces the origins of the modern museum in the Cabinets of Curiosities of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Teratology, the study of abnormalities, has for centuries been a subject of human fascination.

Early cabinets and collections frequently displayed deformed farm animals joined at birth, unicorn horns, mermaids, dragons and other curiosities that were often of dubious origin. The British Museum in London has a *Monkey Mermaid* or *Merman* (aka 'The Feejee Mermaid'), the top half being a dried monkey and the bottom the tail of a fish, which dates from 18th-century Japan.

The 19th-century fascination with circus sideshows featuring human anomalies that swept through Europe and the United States also created a demand for taxidermy freaks of nature, which were exhibited alongside the performers. The travelling shows brought conjoined twins, bearded ladies, giants, dwarfs and all kinds of natural marvels for the amusement of the public.

Also on display would be stuffed two-headed calves or lambs, and piglets with two bodies and extra legs. In the countryside, it was not unusual to see such specimens. Farmers would take newborn deformities to their local taxidermist and then display them in the farmhouse. Without the travelling shows, many town and city dwellers would never have seen such things, and in an age of scientific discovery there was enormous interest.

Nineteenth-century taxidermists saw a growing market and were soon creating their own 'follies', two-headed lambs or calves made by sewing two normal specimens together. It is usually possible to discern the fakes from the stitching and often the prettier and more symmetrical the mount, the more likely it is to be a fabrication. Nevertheless, these follies are interesting curiosities in their own right and are highly collectable today.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, even the educated public had limited knowledge of science and nature and their gullibility was often exploited. Having been fooled for centuries, people became increasingly wary



LEFT: This deformed calf with legs growing from its back was born in the early 20th century.

BELOW: A genuine eight-legged piglet, c. 1890. **FACING PAGE:** Conjoined twin lambs with four ears, one mouth and eight legs. Although exhibited as authentic freaks, many such lambs were fabricated. In this case it is uncertain. Formerly exhibited at the Brading Museum, Isle of Wight.

of odd-looking specimens that purported to be 'discoveries' from distant lands. In around 1798, the first duck-billed platypus arrived in Britain and was presented to a highly sceptical public.

The celebrated American

showman (and conman) Phineas Taylor Barnum (1810–1891; see **FT268:46-49, 343:76-77**) took his travelling circus and museum of freaks around the world. He famously displayed a Feejee Mermaid (**FT254:35, 46-49**), which like previous examples was half monkey and half fish. Before he exhibited this 'natural' curiosity in 1842, the press had already been alerted to his claim that a "Dr Griffin, agent of the Lyceum of Natural History" (in fact a friend of his) would be arriving in New York with a "veritable mermaid taken among the Feejee Islands". The desired media frenzy ensued and it proved to be a sensational attraction.

The eccentric British explorer and naturalist Charles Waterton was well known for his 'Creations'. These had a satirical intent, either religious or political, as well as being attempts to fool the establishment he held in contempt. The 'Nondescript' was his earliest and most famous. He claimed to have captured and beheaded the curious animal that had an alarmingly human face. It was believed by some to be modelled on a Master of Chancery in the House of Commons. The resulting controversy gave Waterton great satisfaction.

In the 19th century, the Germans invented a humorous 'fake'. The southern German *wolpertingers* were fusions of animals and birds to create fictitious and comical beasts,

Follies were made by sewing two normal specimens together







SIMON PASK

FROM WUNDERKAMMER TO MUSEUM

How taxidermy and teratology played a major part in the genesis of the modern museum



FACING PAGE: Malplaquet House, London: A cabinet of curiosities inspired by those created in the 17th century. **ABOVE LEFT:** The wonder cabinet of Francesco Calzolari in an etching of 1622. **ABOVE RIGHT:** An early 19th century view of the Hunterian Museum in the Royal College of Surgeons, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London.

The modern museum has its origins in the 16th and 17th centuries with the cabinet of curiosities, the German *Wunderkammer* or *Kunstkammer*. It was with these *Wunderkammer* that a crude form of taxidermy was developed, as well as a keen interest in the natural world. These cabinets were often whole rooms and their eclectic contents included seashells, corals, horns, skulls, sawfish, pufferfish, chameleons and such animals as crocodiles, tortoises and armadillos, whose hard outer carapaces made them easy to preserve. But interestingly, in early engravings of these *Wunderkammer*, some birds are also visible. In one such cabinet, that of Francesco Calzolari, an apothecary from Verona, Italy, an etching of 1622 shows that among the flying fish, bats, snakes and a shark, there is a row of birds clearly visible. These were early attempts to create life-like specimens, but the techniques for the preservation of soft-skinned animals were still elusive.

The concept of the cabinet

of curiosities began as a royal obsession with Rudolf II (1552–1612), the Holy Roman Emperor, and was adopted by others, including Peter the Great (1672–1725), Tsar of Russia, who created the *Kunstkammer* in St Petersburg. This still exists today as the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, one of the oldest in the world.

Most famous of all *Wunderkammer* is the Augsburg Cabinet, now at Uppsala University, Sweden, which was assembled between 1625 and 1631 and given to the Swedish king in 1632. Among the many private museums created during this key period were the Cospiano Museum and the Ferrante Imperato in Italy, and the celebrated collection of Olaus Wormius (1588–1654), professor of medicine at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, which was used primarily for teaching. Wormius's motivation was in line with that behind many of these cabinets; they were conceived not as mere hoarding but to research medicinal remedies and further scientific understanding.

In an age of exploration that

stretched to the far reaches of Asia, Africa and the Americas, affluent Europeans were now able to acquire natural curiosities from other parts of the world. The intellectual awakening of the Renaissance brought an appetite for knowledge, and the need to understand the natural world and give it a sense of order initiated the process of scientific classification.

The earliest record of a museum open to the general public is that of John Tradescant the Elder (c. 1570–1638), naturalist, gardener, traveller and collector. His house in Lambeth, London, known as 'The Ark', contained a huge collection. A visitor recorded seeing a salamander, a chameleon, a pelican, a flying squirrel, an ape's head, a bat as large as a pigeon and a mermaid's hand. The Ark later became the nucleus of Oxford University's Ashmolean Museum when it opened in 1683.

The term 'museum' was new and at this time was defined as "a study or library; also a college or public place for the resort of learned men".

Tradescant also had a taxidermy dodo. In 1875, while in the care of the Ashmolean Museum, it was examined, deemed to be in poor condition and subsequently burnt. However, it transpired that this was the very last complete specimen in existence. Fortunately, the head and right foot were removed prior to the burning and these are now housed in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History [see **FT370:11**].

Although a certain order was being developed, with Tradescant himself cataloguing his collection, it was not until Swedish botanist Carl Linnæus (1707–1778) undertook the systematic classification of the natural world that collections began to be carefully arranged and accurately labelled. This was the template by which future museums would be transformed from the previously chaotic collecting habits of the cabinet of curios.

For more on *Wunderkammer*, see Mike Jay: "The Old Curiosity Schloss", **FT87:23-25**; and Paul Sieveking, "Little Theatres of the World", **FT179:57**.



ABOVE LEFT: A Feejee Mermaid, one of the most celebrated genres of fake taxidermic specimen. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Originally exhibited in Walter Potter's Museum of Curiosities (see **FT306:36-41** for the story of this remarkable collection), these conjoined twin piglets are preserved in formaldehyde.

often taking the form of rabbits with webbed feet. German emigrants subsequently took the idea to the United States and the 'jackalope' was 'born', a fusion of a jackrabbit or Arctic hare with the horns of a small antelope. These mythical creatures have had an enduring appeal and are still made today. They can be seen in many Bavarian museums as well as in restaurants and bars.

Miniature or 'Roman' dogs, believed to be an extinct breed originally from ancient Rome, were another example of the 19th-century fascination with freaks of nature. In this case, they were pure fabrication and often sold to an unsuspecting public. Taxidermists would fashion a perfectly formed, seemingly adult but miniature dog from real fur – sometimes mouse – with real claws. Placed under glass domes or in cases on pieces of carpet or with small-scale landscapes, these would be sold for large sums, appealing to a public imagination already stirred by Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Sometimes, less artistic effort was employed and stillborn dogs were mounted in standing poses in order to appear adult, although they still retained their puppy-like features. Interestingly, these are most often found in Britain and it is rare to see a taxidermist's label on such cases.

Early in the new millennium, a remarkable discovery was reported in the British media. In a garage in Oxfordshire, a large glass jar housed in a dusty crate revealed what appeared to be a preserved baby dragon [see **FT182:6-7**]. It had soft white skin, tiny claws and teeth, and was perfect in every detail; it even had an umbilical cord. Research into documents attached to the crate uncovered a fascinating story behind the specimen. It is believed that German scientists, in an

Southern German Wolpertingers were fusions of animals and birds

attempt to humiliate and discredit their English rivals in the 1890s, sent the 'dragon' to the Natural History Museum in London. English scientists, however, were not fooled and it was ordered to be destroyed. A porter rescued it and took it home where it remained until his grandson discovered it. However, in this case it was not just the dragon that proved to be fake – the whole story was a publicity stunt!

Taxidermy freaks, as well as their pickled counterparts, can be found in medical museums and teaching hospitals worldwide, with some even devoted specifically to teratology. Fascinating collections can be found in the Grant Museum of Zoology, London, and the famous Hunterian Museums of London and Glasgow. In France there is the Museum of Anatomy of the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier, and the Musée Dupuytren and the Musée Fragonard, both in Paris. Amsterdam is home to the Museum Vrolik, which, like many of its kind, began as the private collection of a gentleman in the field of anatomy. These are just a few that can be viewed by the public.

Perhaps most famous of all collections is the magnificent *Kunstkamer* of Peter the Great in St Petersburg. He purchased a "repository of curiosities" from Dutch

anatomist Frederik Ruysch (1638–1731) in 1697 that formed the core of his collection of 'monstrosities'. Ruysch had already achieved fame for his unique methods of dissection and preservation, which involved injecting coloured dyes into the blood vessels of the deceased human body, enabling detailed observation. He would preserve these specimens in jars, decorating them with lace and artificial flowers. Peter expanded his collection by passing a decree in 1718, ordering all 'monsters' living or dead, human or animal, to be brought to his *Kunstkamer*. Any attempt to conceal such specimens was to incur a considerable fine and consequently donations arrived in large numbers, vastly increasing the number of exhibits.

Centuries of morbid and scientific curiosity have left a lasting legacy of taxidermy and pickled freaks in the museums of the world. The fakes that were created alongside these to fuel an insatiable market for, and interest in, such things are no less fascinating, and both are of historical and cultural importance. As with other subjects within the field of taxidermy, there are avid private collectors of such specimens. It is a subject that continues to intrigue and entertain.

Adapted and extracted from Alexis Turner, *Taxidermy*, 2019 (available to buy from www.thamesandhudson.com) For a chance to win copies of the book, turn to p2.

✦ **ALEXIS TURNER** is the founder of London Taxidermy, which hires and sells to the film and television industry, and a leading UK dealer in taxidermy and natural history. Over the past 25 years he has been instrumental in the revival of the subject.

FAKING IT: TRICKS OF TAXIDERMMY



ABOVE: On the left is an example of a genuine deformity, born on an English farm in 1904, where it was mounted by the local taxidermist. It remained there until 2007 when the farm was sold. The head was found in a bedroom wardrobe. On the right is an example of a 19th-century fake. The symmetry and 'prettiness' arouse suspicion. The stitching, well concealed but visible on close inspection, confirms that it has been fabricated.

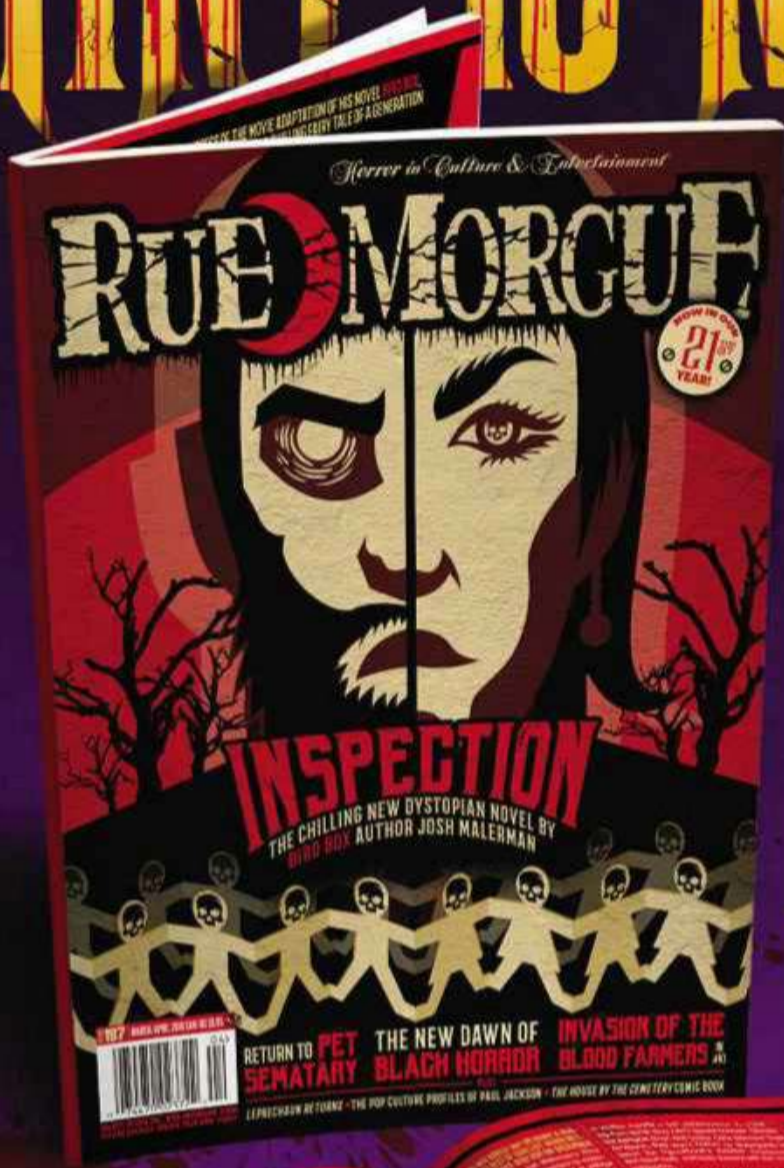
LEFT: These deformed lambs are from the late 19th century. The top example, with its suspicious symmetry, is a fake. The bottom example is a genuine deformity with six legs. **BELOW:** Miniature or dwarf dogs (also sometimes referred to as 'Roman' dogs) purporting to be adults were popular in the 19th century. Many were simply stillborn puppies, but the taxidermist has given them a more adult stance.





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The dark side of the forced

LISA GLEDHILL explores the uncanny nature and horrific potential of a popular perennial.

What vegetable¹ better expresses both horror and absurdity than rhubarb? Hardly surprising, then, that this once-exotic plant has sunk its roots deep into the English soil and the English psyche.

Its deadly reputation comes from the toxic oxalic acid in its broad and clammy leaves. Yet, just a few centimetres away, the stem is juicy and wholesome. As with puffer fish sashimi, there's a frisson in feasting so close to danger. At the same time, there's definitely something funny about rhubarb. Eric Sykes wrote a whole TV comedy where the only word spoken is "rhubarb".² His friends The Goons often mocked the actor's cliché of mumbling "rhubarb" during crowd scenes. Roobarb the leaf-green cartoon dog³ made children and adults laugh throughout the 1970s, and there are loads of rhubarb jokes. My favourite is the one where a small boy watches a man shovelling up horse manure in the street. "Why are you doing that?" asks the boy. "I'm going to put it on my rhubarb," replies the man. After a thoughtful pause the boy says: "We put custard on ours."

The work of surreal painter James M Grainger plays with icons of Englishness, such as morris dancers, cricketers and village greens. It would be hard to find a better distillation of the national mindset than his 1986 work "Smoking Rhubarb", which features Prince Charles perched on a toilet clutching the eponymous vegetable.

Maybe it's this association with manure and bowel movements (it's a useful laxative) that makes rhubarb so appealing to



the English sense of humour. Rhubarb is often grown on dung piles, compost heaps or in shady corners where it smothers the weeds into submission. This affinity for rank, unlovely terrain perhaps explains the darker side of its reputation. Gardeners' folklore says that adding rhubarb leaves to your compost heap will poison the other plants and organic gardeners often use rhubarb leaf tea as an insecticide. Some believe that after midsummer even the stems become poisonous and an elderly neighbour told me that back in the 1920s his five-year-old brother died from eating rhubarb leaves. All of these claims are dubious. Chemical analysis of rhubarb suggests the leaves contain around 500mg oxalic acid per 100g, so to get a lethal dose an adult would need to eat around 5kg (11lb) of leaves.⁴ On the other hand, levels must vary from plant to plant, season to season, and there are few thorough studies of the effects of oxalic acid in combination with other organic substances and minerals. There's a definite sense of mistrust about rhubarb, so who knows whether

it deserves its deadly reputation? I'm not volunteering to make any personal tests.

With such a sinister reputation, it's perhaps surprising that rhubarb doesn't feature more in folklore and mythology. I can't find any references to rogueish rhubarb sprites or ravishing rhubarb nymphs (called Raventiads perhaps? Barry Baldwin would know.) hanging about our vegetable patches. That may be because, like so many thoroughly British foods (chips, tea, curry) rhubarb isn't native. It began arriving here from Russia and the Far East in the late Middle Ages but was mostly used as a medicine. It starts to feature in cookbooks from around the early 19th century,⁵ but only really became popular after growers discovered that raising it in the dark – known as "forcing" – made it much sweeter. Since then, varieties adapted to the British climate, with solidly British names like Timperley Early and Victoria, have made themselves thoroughly at home.

Rhubarb spans the class system, thriving in humble allotments and in the *potagers* of the aristocracy. The National

Collection of Rhubarb (yes, there really is such a thing) occupies the vast walled gardens of the National Trust's Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire. In the right conditions it grows so fast you can actually hear it creaking upwards. The harvest season stretches from January to June, so in an age before imported fresh fruit it was a valuable source of vitamins. Readers of a certain age will remember how popular it was during the years of rationing and austerity. Perhaps it's due another comeback.

Surprisingly, one fertile area of popular culture not yet penetrated by rhubarb's snaky rhizomes is the field of British folk horror. The cryptically named "rhubarb triangle" – an uncanny zone between Wakefield, Rothwell and Morley – is ripe with potential for rhubarb-based terror. Perhaps there's already something lurking in the candle-lit forcing sheds? The tortured offspring of two centuries of selective breeding and confinement. Trapped in the shadows, it's capillaries surging with toxic ichor, it strives towards the light. Hush, what is that sinister creaking sound? And can anyone else smell.... custard?

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⁵ According to *The Oxford Companion to Food*, the earliest recorded recipe for rhubarb tart appears in Mary Eliza Rundell's cookbook of 1806, *A New System of Domestic Cookery*.

♦ **LISA GLEDHILL** is a film-maker and writer with a longstanding interest in *fortean*.

Silver, epilepsy and the Moon

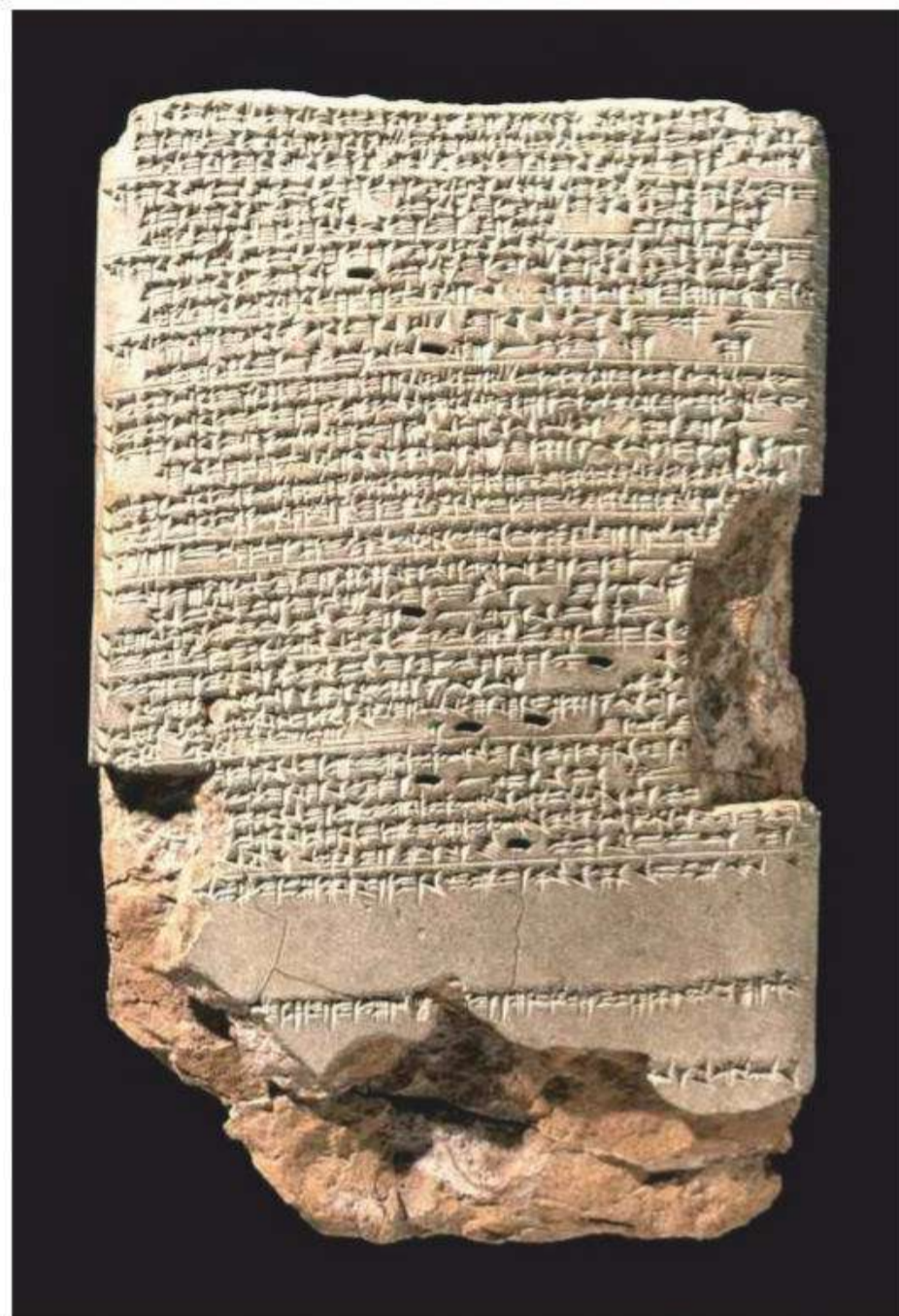
MARK GREENER explains a long tradition of beliefs straddling folklore, myth and medicine.

An Ancient Babylonian cuneiform tablet in the British Museum inscribed in clay between 1067-1046 BC – several hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar II supposedly built the Hanging Gardens – mentions *Sakikku miqtu*, the falling disease. Experts regard the tablet as the first written account of epilepsy.¹ Treatment, however, did not advance far beyond magic and folklore until the discovery of bromide's actions in the mid-19th century² and the recognition of phenobarbital's antiepileptic efficacy in 1912.³

So, to try to understand a disease that, even today, often remains stubbornly enigmatic, civilisations as culturally divergent and geographically distant as Ancient Babylon and the Aztecs linked epilepsy with the Moon. The link proved remarkably persistent through English folk medicine until conventional doctors' use of silver to treat epilepsy in the 19th century.

For example, the Babylonian Pantheon included Sin, also called Nannar, the 'Moon' god. Babylonian iconography shows Sin with a crescent-shaped crown and a beard of lapis lazuli.⁴ Babylonian healers believed that the "the hand of Sin" (*antassubû*) caused epilepsy.

The Ancient Greeks blamed epilepsy on demons and gods – especially, again, the Moon goddess Selene. The Greeks believed Selene cast a miasma on the epilepsy patient's soul as a divine punishment.⁵ Depending on the symptoms, they would also attribute seizures to different deities, such as Cybele, Poseidon, Mars, Hekate, Hermes,



ABOVE: A cuneiform tablet from Babylon – the first written account of epilepsy.

and Apollo. The term epilepsy derives from the Greek for 'seize' or 'attack'.

In a curious convergence of ideas, depictions of the Aztec goddess Tlazolteotl often show signs and symptoms of epilepsy, such as a twisted face and limbs, streaming eyes and a foaming mouth. As Ladino and Téllez-Zenteno remark, in "Mesoamerican society, Tlazolteotl was the lunar deity par excellence".⁶ The Aztecs visualised the Moon as a round vessel containing a sacred liquid. As the Moon waxed and waned, the container tilted and liquid fell to Earth. I'll leave it

circle resembling the crescent Moon.⁷ Silver was an important folk medicine used, for example, to keep water fresh, promote wound healing (it's still included in some dressings), purify blood, treat brain infections, and as a purgative. Healers also connected the planets with different parts of the body. They associated the Moon with the brain, giving rise to the idea of a "lunatic" and presumably strengthening the association with epilepsy.

Certainly, the Moon and silver were associated with epilepsy in folk medicine for centuries. In the early 19th century in rural England, for example, people with epilepsy collected nine pieces of silver and three halfpennies from nine bachelors (for female patients) or nine spinsters (for male patients). A smith turned the silver coins into a ring. The 27 halfpennies became his fee.⁸

As folk healers gave way to scientific physicians, silver remained an important epilepsy treatment. During an 1838 series of lectures held at the Windmill Street School of Medicine in London, Dr George Sigmond suggested that silver nitrate is "highly serviceable" in epilepsy management. He did not mention the folk tradition, but recounted the case of a man, aged about 46 years, who had suffered from epilepsy since infancy. He bit on a silver crown to protect his tongue. On one occasion, however, he swallowed the coin, which lodged in his oesophagus (food pipe).

Although the coin caused the patient, not surprisingly, considerable difficulty swallowing, his general health showed little change. His seizures, however, were "not so violent or frequent". About nine months after the accident, he vomited the coin, which appeared black and "somewhat corroded" around part of the edge. Sigmond suggested that

The ancient Greeks blamed epilepsy on the goddess Selene

to you to decide whether it's a coincidence, evidence of pre-Columbian contact or a common legacy of an older civilisation.

Today, alchemists, pagans and occultists associate silver with the Moon – possibly because of the metal's appearance. Indeed, the occult sign for silver is a half-



silver nitrate “is particularly useful in epilepsy of very long standing, and will very often prove most efficacious after all other remedies have ceased to produce any influence”.⁹

A few years later, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* (now the *New England Journal of Medicine*) recounted that Dr SN Pierce of Cedar Falls, Iowa, used a mix containing, among other ingredients, *Datura stramonium* (the highly toxic plant jimsonweed), strychnine and silver nitrate to treat a 15-year-old girl with epilepsy. He considered the “disease cured, the patient having had only two convulsions during the last five weeks, and these being very slight, occurring in the night, while the patient was asleep”.¹⁰

Silver itself probably had little benefit, however. Indeed, colloidal silver – the same chemical that gave Paul ‘Papa Smurf’ Karason his famous complexion – can induce seizures.¹¹ Rather than a therapeutic effect, the persistence of the link with silver and the Moon might reflect a marked placebo response: the social, cultural, psychological and biological phenomenon that



TOP: Selene grants everlasting sleep to her lover Endymion in Fragonard’s painting. She was also thought to create an epilepsy-causing miasma. ABOVE: Paul ‘Papa Smurf’ Karason, whose odd complexion was the result of taking colloidal silver.

influences every drug effect and each interaction between healthcare professionals and patients.¹² Today, about one-in-10 to one-in-seven placebo users in studies of modern antiepileptic drugs show at least a halving in their seizure frequency.¹³

The link between the Moon and epilepsy persisted for some 3,000 years after an anonymous scribe imprinted the cuneiform descriptions by the rivers of Babylon. The link’s origins may lie much further back in prehistoric times. Later, silver entered the mix as a tangible representation of the Moon. It’s possible that the rituals and long heritage potentially contributed to a marked placebo effect, which may help explain why the tradition persisted for more than three millennia.

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Elements, oil and æther

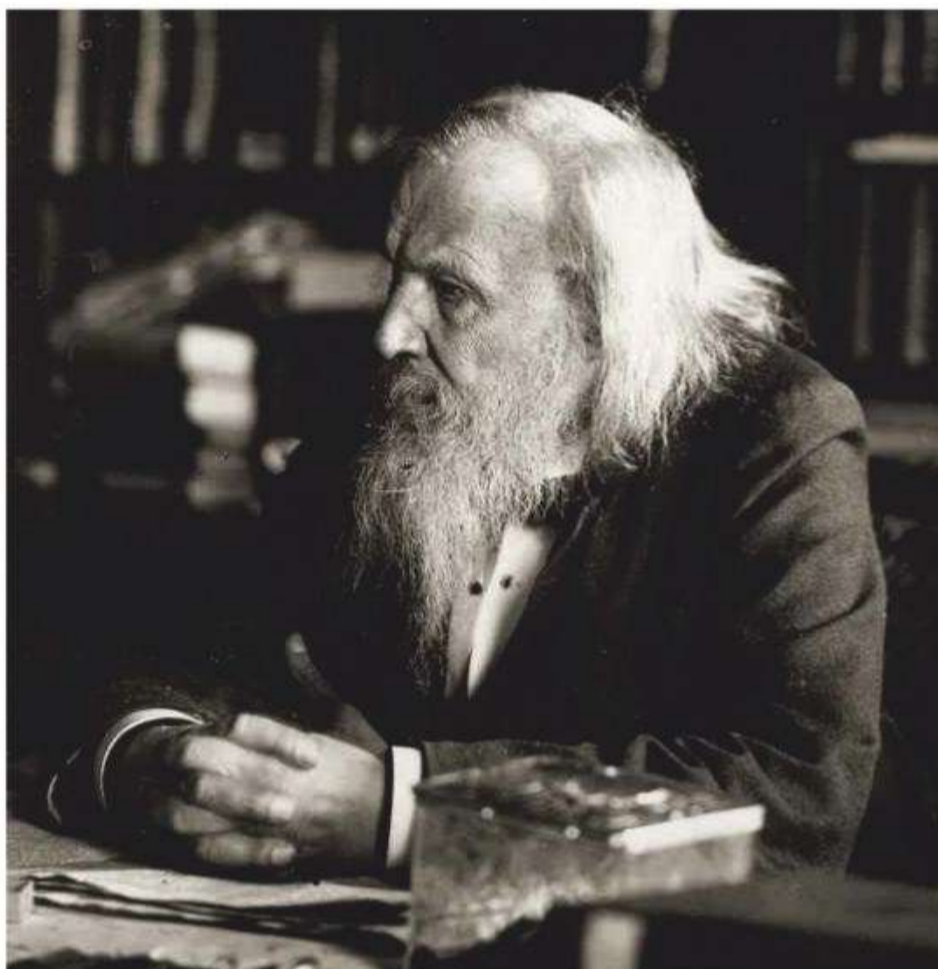
As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Periodic Table, **MATT SALUSBURY** reveals that its inventor, Dmitri Mendeleev, had some pretty strange ideas...

This year marks a century and a half since the appearance of the ground-breaking periodic table of the elements. Unesco has declared 2019 the International Year of the Periodic Table (IYPT2019 for short), with celebratory events throughout the year.

IYPT2019 honours both the periodic table and its inventor, Siberian-born Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev. His *An Attempt at a System of Elements, Based on Their Atomic Weight and Chemical Affinity* was published at St Petersburg University after being conceived in a single day – 17 February 1869 – as an aid to a textbook on inorganic chemistry. Mendeleev's first version of the periodic table was more a list arranged into columns than the beautifully designed minimalist chart we have today.

Recognition of Mendeleev's periodic table really came in 1876 when French chemist Paul-Émile Lecoq de Boisbaudran, unaware of Mendeleev's work, discovered a missing element, which he named gallium. Mendeleev had predicted this element as "68?" on his table, accurately foretelling its characteristics.

Mendeleev didn't regard his periodic table as his greatest achievement. He saw himself more as a physicist than a chemist, although he also found time to design Russia's trade tariffs system and do battle with what he regarded as the alarming rise of Spiritualism in Russia, even within its scientific



LEFT: Dmitri Mendeleev.

community. He instigated the 1875 Commission for the Investigation of Mediumistic Phenomena, which tested Spiritualist claims almost to destruction in a series of gruelling and highly publicised scientific trials of spirit mediums. Mendeleev concluded in his *Materials for a Judgement about Spiritualism* that these were frauds and that "the Spiritualist doctrine is superstition."

He was also an art critic, balloonist and a political influencer with access to ministers and the tsar. He introduced metrification into Russia, had a go at arctic exploration and volunteered his services as an expert witness in poisoning trials, as an inspector of cheese and as an adviser on alcohol taxation. (His doctoral thesis was *On the Combination of Alcohol and Water*.)

Some of Mendeleev's big ideas, though, were bizarrely wrong. Much of his career was spent in sometimes heavily state-subsidised research into gas expansion, looking

He also did battle with the rising tide of Spiritualism

for that mysterious entity the "luminiferous æther". This was a fluid medium saturating the entire Universe, which he thought was lighter than all the elements "by a million times". Æther would account for the "undulations" of light, but also gravity, Mendeleev believed. A heavily revised later version of his periodic table included the æther – indicated by a lower-case italic "x" on a row of its own at the top left, above what's now accepted as the lightest element – hydrogen. To the left of hydrogen in the same chart was another lighter-than-hydrogen fantasy element, "coronium". Mendeleev had lost interest in the expensive quest for æther by 1878, but returned to it in later life.

It was while wearing yet another of his many hats – as a consultant to the Imperial Russian oil industry, based in Baku, Azerbaijan – that Mendeleev came up with another of his paradigm-shaking fortan ideas. Mendeleev helped establish Baku's first oil refinery and was an early advocate of innovations in oil production and safety such as pipelines, although it was a while before the Baku oilmen adopted his ideas.

The oil industry was then still in its infancy, most of its commercial cracking of crude oil was to obtain paraffin for "illumination". An 1865 technical manual for the oil industry by Henry Erni¹ noted that oil-based paints, varnishes and petroleum soap were already a thing. The first petrol-driven vehicle, Karl Benz's 1893 motor tricycle, was still a long way off.

As long as oil prospectors knew what surface signs to look for, giving clues to oil-bearing strata below, they didn't bother much with the theory of what oil actually was.

The mainstream view, formed at the time, which still mostly holds today, was that oil is a fossil fuel, the product of vast amounts of decayed marine algæ and plankton. Oil is made of hydrocarbons – complex combinations of carbon and hydrogen molecules – that are supposed to be the broken down cell membranes of microbial life-forms that died and sank to the beds of seas and rivers hundreds of thousands or millions of years ago.

There, so the theory goes, the dead plankton and algæ became trapped under layers of sediment. As geological action over the æons pushed the oil-bearing strata further down, the action of immense heat and pressure caused the hydrocarbons in the algæ and plankton's cell membranes to break down



– and that’s what crude oil is. There is an “oil window” around 2-4km below the surface, where the temperature is about 60°-120°C (140-248°F), where the distillation process producing crude oil is thought to occur. The oil can then percolate through layers of porous rock, such as sandstone or pumice.

Erni declared that oil was “proved by its composition” to be “evidently of organic origin... a product of chemical decomposition, derived from organic remains, plants and animals, whole generations of which perished and accumulated during many destructive revolutions at the various ages of our planet.”

The evidence for this biological origin was mostly the “fetid” or “garlic” smells encountered in some oilfields. “Sweet crude” – crude oil with low sulphur content – is so-called because of its sickly sweet smell and taste, while hydrocarbons in which the chains of carbon and hydrogen atoms form into circles are known as “aromatic hydrocarbons” because they often have a fragrant aroma to them.

Early attempts to explain the process by which dead plankton ended up as crude oil included “steam generated by volcanic action”, “uplifting gas forces”, or “dry distillation”. As Erni noted, “many other theories have gained some ground, though mostly with the vulgar.”

Mendeleev, though, was having none of this. He found the “biotic” (biological) explanation for oil not “satisfactory.” In his 1877 article “L’Origine du Pétrole”,² he asked: “Where, when and how happened this useful substance?” He insisted that “metal carbides” reacted with water “deep within the Earth” to form acetylene (C_2H_2), which subsequently condenses to form heavier, more complex hydrocarbons.

Mendeleev noticed that hydrocarbon-rich areas tend to be hydrocarbon rich at lower levels of different geological epochs, even in the basement rock below strata of sediment from epochs showing no similarities in vegetation or climate. He

Handwritten manuscript of Mendeleev's first periodic system of elements, dated 17 Feb 1869. The document is written in Russian and includes the title "Элементы химическое" (Chemical Elements) and "Система" (System). It features a table of elements with their atomic weights and chemical symbols, arranged in a periodic fashion. The elements are listed in columns and rows, with some elements marked as unknown or hypothetical. The handwriting is in cursive, and the paper shows signs of age and wear.

Row	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6
1	H=1	Li=7	Na=23	K=39	Rb=85	Cs=132
2	Be=9	B=10	C=12	N=14	O=16	F=19
3	Mg=24	Al=27	Si=28	P=31	S=32	Cl=35
4	Ca=40	Sc=45	Ti=48	V=51	Cr=52	Mn=55
5	Fe=56	Ni=59	Cu=63	Zn=65	As=75	Se=78
6	Br=80	Kr=84	Rb=85	Sr=88	Y=90	Zr=91
7	Nb=94	Mo=96	Tc=98	Ru=101	Rh=103	Pd=106
8	Ag=108	Cd=112	In=75	Sn=119	Sb=122	Te=128
9	I=127	Xe=131	Ba=137	La=139	Ce=140	Pr=141
10	Th=140	Pa=141	U=142	Np=143	Pu=144	Am=145

ABOVE: Manuscript of Mendeleev's first periodic system of elements, 17 Feb 1869.

noted that some oilfields were in Tertiary strata, from early in the age of mammals, while on other continents, crude oil was extracted from much more ancient Silurian strata, from the age of primitive toothless fish. He observed that whatever it was, oil had clearly travelled great distances from the places where it is found, and that the material “we take from the heart of the Earth” had apparently “never seen the light of day” before. He noticed that a small proportion of meteorites – the carbonaceous chondrites – contained carbon, which can’t have been of biological origin. Nor was there evidence in oil of the enormous quantities of organic debris we’d expect to see if it really was just deceased sea creatures. He suspected oil originated within

the bowels of the Earth, in much “deeper layers than those where we encounter it.”

A lot has happened in science since then to support Mendeleev’s apparently wacky-sounding idea. Carbon turns out to be much more common in space and on other heavenly bodies than we thought. Saturn’s largest moon, Titan, is now known to have clouds and rains of methane, with lakes and seas of ethane and methane, while there are vast dust clouds in space that contain glycolaldehyde ($HOCH_2CHO$), a carbohydrate that’s a distant cousin of sugar. Carbon, it turns out, is the Universe’s fourth most abundant element – nearly all of it in the form of hydrocarbons. Only a very tiny proportion of all the carbon in the Universe is the remains of dead creatures.

We now think that the young Earth was never completely molten – it seems vast quantities of hydrocarbons formed in the Earth as it cooled and became trapped at great depths.

The discovery of deep-sea tube worms *Riftia pachyptila* happily living in volcanic deep-sea geological vents, surviving by chemically synthesising hydrogen sulphide, even throws up the possibility of life forms living down there among the oil. Others have taken Mendeleev’s “abiotic” (non-biological) oil origin idea and run with it. Professor Thomas Gold’s *The Deep Hot Biosphere* (Springer Verlag, 1999) goes so far as to propose that hopanoids – very basic micro-fossils found in crude oil – aren’t fossil plankton biomarkers at all, but recent life forms that live by chemically synthesising the hydrocarbons deep beneath the Earth; he estimates at 10km down, at temperatures of 100°C (212°F) and above. Gold even suggests that very early life forms billions of years ago colonised the deep subterranean oil reservoirs, long before life on the surface evolved.

Unlike Mendeleev’s “luminiferous ether” fantasy and his lighter-than-hydrogen element coronium, his bizarre-sounding idea that oil forms in the centre of the Earth may turn out to have been right on the money after all.

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♦ MATT SAULUSBURY is a regular FT contributor and freelance journalist.

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

46. THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY

According to one source we've seen, scholars estimate that there have been around 2,500 apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) recorded in the last couple of thousand years. Of these, a mere 12 have been passed as genuine by the Roman Catholic Church. There are a handful more approved by the Greek Orthodox and Coptic Churches. And this despite a couple of hundred among the saints and the beatified reporting an encounter or two with the BVM. What, then, it may be asked, is so important about the apparent visitation of the BVM to three eight-year-old schoolgirls in Marpingen, in the Saarland, in July 1876? This was not given the *imprimatur* of the Pope or even the local bishop, and all but disappeared from Marian memory. The answer to our question, oddly, is the book we commend to your bookshelf today. It's a massive, exhaustive treatment of the events in Marpingen by a highly distinguished historian of modern Germany, and he sets them firmly in their social and political context. The result is a kind of template of how such experiences should be approached, and what, beneath their surface, can be revealed.

First, then, the context. Bear with us for this, as it has many facets, but it's also crucial. A key event occurred a few decades before the Marian visions, when in 1834 the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha sold the Saarland to the King of Prussia; he got not a lump sum, but 80,000 thaler a year for it: a tidy sum. The Saar was always, and still is, a staunchly Catholic area; and now it was taken over by a militantly Protestant government. Apart from the locals having suddenly to deal with less than easy-going Prussian officials, this was but the latest in a series of unsettling changes of administration. The 1834 deal was the last in a cluster. Having been part of the Duchy of Lorraine for five centuries, in 1766 the Duchy became part of France, in a land-swap. In 1787, it was taken over by the Duchy of Zweibrücken, only to return to France when the Duke fled Napoleon's revolutionary army in 1793. After Napoleon's final defeat in 1815 the district was batted about between various administrations until being settled on the Saxe-Coburg-Gothas in 1816 and then hawked off to Prussia in 1834. It was not what you might call a settled place – indeed you might call it liminal – and 40 years is not long in folk memory.

Normality, such as it was, was further undermined by a change in the laws of land ownership: the effect was somewhat akin to the enclosures of common land in 18th-century England, with peasants no longer able (legally) to have access, for example,

to the Härtelwald forest around Marpingen, in which their animals had grazed and from which they had freely gathered (or hunted) animals, fruit, firewood, and even coal. The forest had always been a kind of safety net in time of need, a food and fuel bank. But the rationalising Prussian forestry managements rigorously enforced their rules, and confrontations were common. One long-term effect was to reduce peasant farmers to mortgaging their land to loan sharks to tide them over hard times.

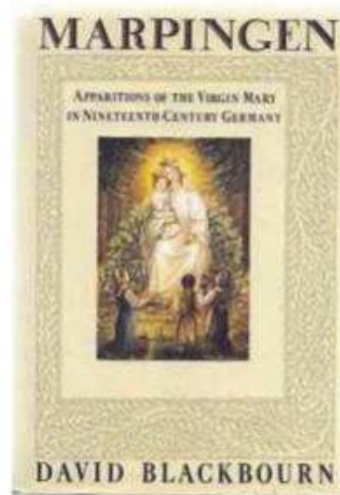
All this came on top of chronic insecurity caused by the frequent appearance of troops in the area, thanks to Saarland's border with the eternally disputed Alsace Lorraine, which bordered on France. The union with Prussia ostensibly gave the Saar an economic advantage through the *Zollverein*, a species of customs union among the Prussian vassal states, but for the more enterprising common folk it disrupted an ancient tradition of earning a bit on the side through cross-border smuggling.

The upshot of these underlying and immediate circumstances was several-fold. First was emigration out of the area, to places as far apart as the United States and Algeria. Second, as the coalfields

of the Saar were developed from the 1850s, was a part-time 'emigration' of menfolk from Marpingen (and many other similar villages), who would commute, or walk, to work as miners, lodging in grim and none too hygienic barracks during the week (like *Gastarbeiter*, says Blackburn), returning home for perhaps 30 hours at weekends. This altered the dynamics of the affected families, giving the mothers of children more power and autonomy but, concomitantly, more or less total responsibility for *everything* to do with family and farm. The third effect was perhaps the most significant: Saarlanders revived and retreated into their Catholicism, and one of the pivotal elements of this was an almost unprecedented emphasis on Mariolatry. This was an aspect of Christian faith that Protestants had not carried over from the old Church in the Reformation, so was a defining, and in the Saar perhaps defiant, affirmation of their distinct religious difference from their noxious Prussian masters. From 1864, Marpingen's parish priest was Fr Jakob Neureuter, "who shared with his sister, who accompanied him to Marpingen, a fierce devotion to the Virgin Mary", often mentioned in his sermons along with the 1858 apparition and subsequent miracles at Lourdes.

The 1870s saw matters coming to a head. First there was the Prussian victory in a war against France, whose net result in 1871 was a unification of most German states and statelets under Prussia, and the declaration of the German Empire. This led to a classic boom-and-bust, as money from reparations paid by the French poured into the economy; a stock-market bubble developed, which burst in 1873, its effects spreading as far as Russia and the USA; the German economy did not fully recover until the 1890s. In the Saar, coalminers were laid off, wages cut and hours extended, particularly in state-owned mines, while demand for agricultural produce went down; as prices rose, wages sank.

The disheartening depression occurred just after the onset of the Prussians' *Kulturkampf* – Bismarck's campaign, from



1871, to bring the Catholic Church under state control. One aspect of this was the authorities' attempting to suppress and/or discourage membership of various Catholic associations, many of them dedicated to the BVM. As well, Church appointments (including teaching posts) had to be approved by the authorities, but the Church did not approve, indeed proved thoroughly disobliging, with the result that numerous bishops found themselves heavily fined and dumped in gaol – somewhat less salubrious quarters than the average ecclesiastical palace. Among them was Bishop Eberhard of Trier, in whose diocese Marpingen lay. Possibly as a result of his nine-month incarceration, he died a month before the visions there began. No successor was appointed, which was why there was not even a local clerical investigation, and hence no official endorsement of any kind, of the Marpingen story. The *Kulturkampf* also explains why the Prussians reacted in such a heavy-handed manner to the visions there.

The Marpingen story itself is quite simple. On 3 July 1876, all the able-bodied people in the village were out helping with the harvest. Those too small to be any help – such as eight-year-olds Katharina Hubertus, Susanna Leist and Margaretha Kunz, along with two six-year-olds, Lischen Hubertus and Anna Miesberger – were given lighter, but still useful tasks. This quintet of incy-wincies was sent into the Härtelwald forest to gather berries. As dusk began to fall, in a wild meadow just outside the forest, Susanna Leist saw a “white figure”, and: “When the girls reached home, agitated and frightened, all three described seeing a woman in white carrying a child in her arms. There is some dispute over the initial reactions of parents, siblings, and neighbours, but it is clear that the girls remained in a state of excitement. Margaretha slept badly and prayed a lot, Katherina dreamed of the woman in white, Susanna was reluctant to go to bed at all.” But that was not all. When the three older children – the six-year-olds drop out of the tale from now on – returned to the same place next day, it seems they had been primed somewhat. Indeed Susanna's mother told them that they should pray, and if the ‘woman in white’ appeared again, they should “ask who she is; if she says she is the Immaculately Conceived, then she is the Blessed Virgin.” They did, and she did; the girls asked what they should do, and were told to pray, and while they did, “the figure disappeared.” The original seer, Susanna, did not see the apparition.

And then the children “began to claim apparitions in other parts of the village – in their homes, in barns and stables, in the school, in the graveyard and the church. The visions they described became more luxuriant. The Virgin appeared with and without the Christ-child, sometimes accompanied by angels. She was dressed now in white, now in gold and azure. The apparitions also took on darker tones. On

“YOU CAN
NEVER GET
A CUP OF
TEA LARGE
ENOUGH OR
A BOOK LONG
ENOUGH TO
SUIT ME.”

CS Lewis

one occasion the girls reported seeing the Virgin clad in black, on another they described a celestial procession passing over the graveyard. The devil also appeared.” On one occasion the Virgin joined the girls in rolling merrily down a hill. On 5 July, one of Katharina Hubertus's sisters had her “bad foot” healed, the first step, as it were, in Marpingen's being touted as ‘the German Lourdes’. What's apparent from Blackburn's account is that not only did the girls agree happily to various suggestions as to details of the Virgin's appearance, but that their narrative was subtly shaped to emulate Bernadette Soubirous's at Lourdes (the ‘authorised myth’).

Word spread first among the girls' extended families, and thence to the rest of the village; and then some of the village menfolk claimed to have seen the Virgin too. That gave the girls' account a kind of *imprimatur*, and the press got hold of the story. A ‘healing spring’ was discovered nearby. Then the pilgrims flooded in: by 10 July, the village was crowded with 20,000 of them, come to gaze upon the visionaries and drink the healing water. This was later declared contaminated, but people continued to imbibe it, allegedly to good effect.

The Prussians were *not* impressed. Such an upsurge of popular piety was precisely the kind of thing the *Kulturkampf* had been intended to suppress. One of their dafter ruses was to send in an undercover detective posing as a wealthy Irishman – rather like a Texan claiming to come from Edinburgh while gumshoeing in Cornwall. Other measures were less farcical, as people were arrested for ‘unlawful pilgrimage’, whatever that is, and illegally renting out rooms, while the forest was declared out of bounds, and ere long the children were ‘taken into care’ to be grilled by examining magistrates for some weeks. Meanwhile, the freaked-out local gendarmes asked for military assistance, and on the evening of 13 July a company of infantry marched into the village and to the apparition spot

where, receiving some mockery from the crowd, they fixed bayonets and laid about them with rifle butts and sometimes blades. Having dispersed the crowd, they then aggressively billeted themselves on the village, to no one's enchantment. The local priest, who had several officers parked on him, particularly noticed “the retreat into silence of his dog Türk, who spent most of his time under the sofa bearing a lugubrious expression.” Two weeks later, the soldiers marched home.

The three visionaries, under the Protestant inquisition, alternately recanted their claims and insisted on their truth – the latter when in company of their families, who from initial scepticism had now fully endorsed the girls' accounts. The recantations made no difference to the enthusiasm of the pilgrims, who continued to arrive in droves. Many of them must have felt that the visions vindicated their faith, after what in their eyes was persecution by the state, and one can't help but wonder if a trip to Marpingen was as much an act of defiance as of devotion. But they did the children no favours. “Pilgrims crowded in and around their parents' homes, asking the children to repeat what they had seen and pestering them to sign pictures. In the words of one visiting priest, they found themselves “in a state of siege... one day they were kept at the apparition site from 8am to 11pm, until almost collapsing from exhaustion... These were children of eight, after all...”

The fuss did eventually die down, and in 1889 Margaretha Kunz, waiting to become a novice nun, wrote her own account of what had happened. On the first night, she says, “her own mother was initially sceptical, suggesting that the figure was “only a cord of wood [a stack 4ft by 4ft by 8ft (1.21 by 1.21 by 2.43m)], and because it was dark you thought you had seen a woman. She was right,” added Margaretha, “for later I satisfied myself that it was stacked up wood lying there with the white side pointing outwards.” The whole thing, Margaretha wrote, had been “one big lie”. And as matters escalated the girls found themselves in the classic hoaxers' trap: they had gone too far, too insistently and too elaborately to back out. On top of the personal and social embarrassment, Marpingen's patron was the Virgin; the village festival took place on the Feast of the Assumption. They would be admitting a kind of blasphemy. And so the girls kept quiet and the pilgrimages continued, albeit waning in numbers over the years.

Blackburn's book examines every aspect of the Marpingen visions, and in the course of it inevitably raises questions about the nature and dynamics of other Marian visionaries. A book to leave the reader pondering many a topic, it's a forteen classic that was never designed as such – and maybe all the better for that.

David Blackburn, *Marpingen*, Alfred A Knopf, 1994

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Seven for the seven stars in the sky

Long ago and far away, a shamanic people worshipped the Mother Goddess, female bears, a sacred mountain and the number seven... which is not, as it turns out, the universal prime number

Eden in the Altai

The Prehistoric Golden Age and the Mythic Origins of Humanity

Geoffrey Ashe

Bear and Company 2018

Pb, 359pp, illus, £14.99, ISBN 9781591433217

The Altai Mountain region of central Asia – until recently, best known for *altaite*, a rare, lead telluride mineral whose presence hints at gold (rather apposite, as ‘Altai’ means golden), or for the enraptoring [sic] Altai throat singing, beloved by physicist Richard Feynmann – has produced an even greater wonder.

In 2010, in a cave, the Denisovans were born, an extinct human sub-species (not a sub-human species), *H. sapiens denisova/Altai*, a people more allied to *H. sapiens neanderthalensis* than *H. sapiens sapiens*, but still a minor contributor to our genes. They finally dispersed into the sunrise of the Philippines, Australia and the South Seas.

What a stroke of luck for the Glastonbury domiciled, nonagenarian author (best known for his Arthurian works); it is more than tempting to think that these “almost human” “evolutionary approximation” hominins were a spur for this re-issue.

Eden in the Altai was published in 1992 as *Dawn behind the Dawn: A search for the Earthly Paradise*. The author has retained the Eden/Paradise theme not only between titles but in all of the text, though a rather non-PC/species-ist paragraph on page 300 (see above) is new. This is a true Ashe’s to Ashe’s phoenix of a book.

While many non-fiction books recycle into later editions

with moderate to substantial changes in text and emphasis as hypotheses are distilled, refined, rejected, it appears to be an immutable phenomenon for alternative ‘science’/deep history explainers not to abandon their primary position but just change titles, up the cost and move on – or rather, stand still. It is an ill wind, as second-hand copies of earlier editions are always cheap and seemingly just as informative.

Ashe’s central question is simple: “Did an ancient culture exist [...] that was a seedbed of motifs in recorded ones?” Naturally, he answers yes, but, due credit, there is no Atlantean speculation, no shared pyramids, no extraterrestrial *ex machina* (not even daddy Zeus) and all geographies are real (well, almost all). His truth is that far, far away and long, long ago in the Siberian Altai mountains, a matristic, shaman-led (shamanka-led?) people worshipped the great Mother Goddess, female bears, a big sacred mountain and the number seven.

This devotion has seeded many subsequent societies and beliefs – beliefs sustained and transmitted by Sumerians, Jews, Greeks and northern Indians and even Native Americans; from Abraham to Isaac Newton; and from modestly attired, twinned Apollo–Artemis to Snow White and her tiny friends to ‘Green Grow the Rushes, O’, a folk song/carol first recorded from the West Country:

Eight for the April Rainers

Seven for the seven stars in the sky
And six for the six proud walkers.

In this song (oddly overlooked by Ashe), far divorced from the Altai Mountains in time and space, there is a detectable transmission echo. Seven is

“Ashe’s question is: ‘Did an ancient culture exist that was a seedbed of motifs in recorded ones?’”

visually manifested in the brightest stars in Ursa (not Ursus) Major, the Great Bear in both Siberia and Somerset. This heavenly sign is a change from belted Orion, Vega or the Pleiades, which can also claim to be the seven stars of the carol. (The April Rainers refer to the appearance of the open star cluster The Hyades in Taurus to herald “Aprille with his shoures soote”.)

For in this book the number seven is central, far more than the sum of its parts three and four, although there is much rival talk of them, some of it as gospel.

But seven is not the universal prime, for on Siberia’s eastern border in China, five is favoured over its slightly larger odd neighbour, as is very lucky eight. It seems that seven was spread by the Indo-Aryans, followed much later by cider-swilling folk singers. Chasing our lucky number throughout the Near East, the Indian sub-continent and in antiquarian texts in general is great sport, though in places the linkages – at sixes and sevens – become a bit haphazard. But there are little gems (incidentally, all precious stones, other than pearls, must have a hardness greater than 7 on Moh’s scale) and introductions along the way to the Sleepers of Ephesus, Noah’s Ark with its seven pairs of clean animals and birds slipping away from a

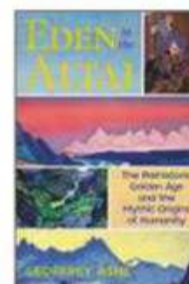
flooded Atlantis (a combination of two great legends for the price of one), but the best of all is a typo (p179). Whilst discussing the overthrow of empires, the text reads “Babylon falls on its tum” (for “falls in its turn”) a softer, novel interpretation of Belshazzar’s feast perhaps. A very favourite piece of loo wall graffiti (Manchester University Student Union 1965) is germane here. Somebody (from the ‘God squad’?) had written ‘Mene mene tekkel upharsim’, beneath, in a different hand, ‘Ah, one of the golden oldies’.

Unlike era-less graffiti, this book is of its time and even in 1990 was probably a little less than *avant garde*.

There is some very well-meaning discussion of women’s liberation and mention of the then current fashionable libbers, but times and names have changed and his text, trying to advance a more gender-equal world, now appears patronising, ill-placed and slightly forced. That is a minor wrong path, paved with good intentions, but the last 30 years – not least through changing archaeological fashions, new linguistic studies and cheap genetics, and our ‘better’ understanding of the ‘deep past’ – makes much of the text appear naïve. One of the great problems working with ancient nomads is that for every generation their homeland moves around.

The book does not present the highest production values: the very few figures are soft and fuzzy, but as they add little to the text this not a worry. However, the defining two-page map ‘Asia and Old Europe’

Continued on p62



Burn, baby, burn

Too many unreferenced and unchecked assertions, but there's a glimmer of promise

Borderland Phenomena

Volume One – Spontaneous Combustion, Poltergeistery and Anomalous Lights

Louis Proud

August Night Books 2019

Pb, 220pp, bib, ind, £12.99, ISBN 9781786770790

Fortean phenomena are anything but simple to understand, let alone explain. With a stated aim of addressing spontaneous human combustion (SHC), poltergeists, and anomalous lights and linking them together in “a lucid and coherent picture of the paranormal”, this book leads the reader to expect a deeply researched volume with a profusion of original sources as its foundation. Such a project, of course, would constitute a life's work, tackled in small steps over decades, for the paths are unclear and dangerous pitfalls abound. Louis Proud attempts to pull in scientific knowledge and the views of proponents of fringe topics to connect these three phenomena; unfortunately, he doesn't really achieve his goal.

The first of three parts, that on SHC, is the strongest. There is certainly something here that we should pay attention to. Yet, the same stories are retold without references or fact-checking.

The hint of association with trance states is a teaser – it goes nowhere. The poltergeist information is also incomplete. The chapter that introduces the reader to several famous cases cites only two references – one of which is a

paranormal encyclopædia.

The section on anomalous lights – historically framed in terms of UFOs, consciousness effects, folklore, geology and everything in between – is under-researched and disjointed.

These are daunting topics to tackle. Proud attempts too much and is not sufficiently well-equipped for the task.

Many references to scientific views on these subjects are from popular rather than professional sources, or are not referenced at all.

Many of Proud's conclusions are subjective and (currently) unfounded, such as the claim

that ball lightning and earthquake lights are scientifically accepted.

There are good reasons why science as a community is inherently conservative and I am

unconvinced that the author knows how the scientific process works.

The text is interspersed with personal anecdotes, which disrupts the intended tone.

The book frequently loses focus and does not flow: we are diverted with opinions on djinn, possession, and fairies that are not effectively woven into the narrative.

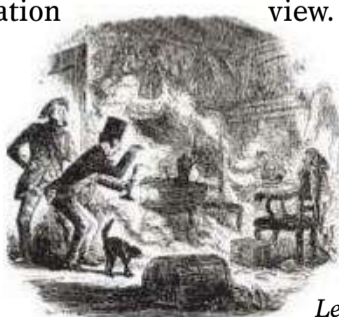
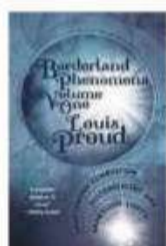
In the interstices, there is content suitable to develop short articles and essays, but the scholarship is too limited for a full-length book treatment; however, one can see the beginnings of thoughtful future directions for examining fortean phenomena. There are nuggets here, but they do not form a coherent view.

Watch for this author about 20 years from now – I'm sure his content will evolve.

Sharon Hill

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Left: Dickens's *Bleak House*



Continued from p61

shows Middle Eastern sites centre page, but has swallowed into the binding all of Asia from Dhaka to Bangkok and most of western Siberia, including the Altai Mountains, and cannot be viewed without ripping the book apart. It would be politer to save that until it is read.

It is a well-written, pleasant read, inoffensive, not very persuasive, and it could be dismissed in that most damning of phrases ‘mostly harmless’, but, – like Merlin producing a couple of white mice from an empty top hat, comes the reveal... six (the first perfect number) times seven is 42, and everyone knows what that is the answer to.

So it must be true, indeed, perhaps, unknowingly, the book seductively strips away seven veils to reveal, in all her glory, its golden cosmic insight.

But before we lose our heads...

Rob Ixer

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

False Economies

The Strangest, Least Successful and Most Audacious Financial Follies, Plans and Crazes of All Time

SD Tucker

Amberley 2018

Pb, 320pp, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781445672342

The ‘dismal science’ has from the outset been as much derided as lauded (its inception caused ripples of hollow laughter among practitioners of the natural sciences) and it has never, despite the accreditation of a Nobel prize, been universally accepted as a science at all. Rightly so, perhaps; its signal lack of predictive power, and the continuous series of shocks and debacles in the world of finance, would struggle to constitute food for approbation. So it's little surprise that the fringes of economic thought should turn out to be truly lunatic.

SD Tucker, a regular contributor to *FT*, has gathered a compendium of the wackiest streams of economic thought; in *False Economies* he has catalogued, narrated and often roundly ridiculed the offbeat theorising of a whole gallery of eccentrics, from poets and novelists who should know better,

to politicians whose disoriented meddling in the financial affairs of their own countries has led to economic anarchy, comedy, and occasionally ruin.

After an introduction that plants a suitably trenchant ‘well, what did you expect?’ into the now thoroughly dispiriting Brexit debate, Tucker turns his acerbic lens onto the works of Ezra Pound, a glittering poet and, sadly, rabid antisemite and fascist apologist.

Pound's deeply eccentric view of mediæval history led him to locate the source of all economic woes on the undeserving tables of a few Jewish money-lenders; usury had contaminated the financial stream of European history (“with usury hath no man a solid house”) and replaced early economic innocence with a fallen system of debt and despotism.

Unfortunately, Pound fondly assumed that fascism, under the leadership of Mussolini, would fix things; and he was happy to treat Il Duce to a lecture on the best ways to do so.

Pound's solution to the perceived problem was no less eccentric than his definition of it, and Tucker skewers his increasingly potty perorations on money-as-ticket/money-as-potato with gusto and glee.

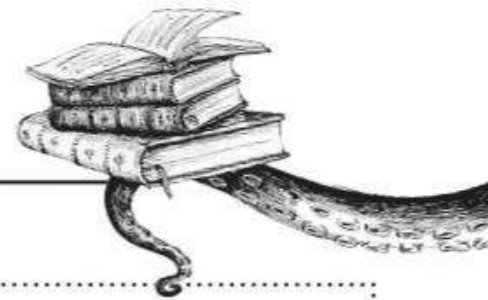
He broadens his attack to include theories of Distributism (also, as are many of the

examples in the book, the product of literary rather than financial intellects – in this case GK Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc) and to show that many of the alternative theories of economics that

have graced the pages of 20th century history are based on fixed moralities (Catholicism, in the case of Distributism).

This theme, of a moral or spiritual stance being brought to bear on the troubled (and determinedly secular) world of economics, recurs in the book. The thinking of Sergei Bulgakov (yes, another literary figure) is a case in point: Bulgakov, as with many members of Tucker's oddball cast, is not so much an alternative economist as an anti-economist, seeing all developed systems of economics as a species of biblical fall, best fixed by what Tucker describes as falling back upwards into Paradise.





There is a sort of flaky fundamentalism at work here, it seems; a project for an impossible return to a world without money, or debt, or consumerism, where an airy form of saintly economic subsistence is grubbed from the giving ground.

And of course it gets weirder; like uninvited fortean guests at a normie wedding, aliens, ghosts and vampires infiltrate the Wall Street of the mind. And where the weird go, there goes Benjamin Crème, who, in the heady Thatcherite days of the 1980s, emerged to claim that Jesus Christ, having reincarnated as a Pakistani mystic in a Himalayan cave, was now working as a porter for the NHS, and would soon go public with a spiritually economic – or economically spiritual – plan for salvation. But then, when a US presidential candidate can run on an economic ticket provided by aliens, and even garner a few thousand votes (some people are bound to be up for the abolition of death and taxes) a second economic coming is almost mundane.

However, as Tucker concludes, if the mainstream of economics has no adequate answer to the rampant madness that led to the Crash of 2008, or the glaring inequity of hyper-globalisation, it's little wonder that some will take it upon themselves to come up with the silver bullet, and that, however vague and illogical their flaky fixes may be, there will probably be an audience for them.

In the meantime, he warns, it might be time for the 'real' economists to get a grip and prevent our financial system from suffering more meltdowns and ending up in a situation just as crazy as any contemplated by this cranky cavalcade of maverick mavens.

False Economies is a sober account of inebriated economic thinking: trenchant, conservative, and occasionally veering towards contempt (particularly for ideas derived from Marx); but it is also a witty, worthwhile excursion to the wilder shores of human thought, and the elephant traps that await those who fall for 'Paradise on a plate at zero cost'.

Noel Rooney



The quotidian mystery

An accessible and intriguing introduction to the biological basis of a universal phenomenon with relevance to many fortean favourites

The Nocturnal Brain

Nightmares, Neuroscience and the Secret World of Sleep

Guy Leschziner

Simon and Schuster 2018

Hb, 353pp, bib, illus, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781471176357

Sleep disorders are remarkably common. Leschziner notes that about one in three people experiences poor sleep, one in 10 chronic insomnia, one in 15 sleep apnoea and one in 20 restless legs syndrome. This book summarises the latest thinking about the fascinating, fundamental biological processes behind these common – but potentially distressing, even debilitating – disorders. Sceptics use sleep disorders to explain disparate phenomena, making the book a useful addition to your fortean library.

Circadian rhythms (biological processes, such as sleep, that vary over the day) are “hardwired into the very essence of life”. Billions of years ago, simple organisms – such as bacteria and algæ – evolved the ability to distinguish light and dark, possibly to avoid replicating during the day, when they're exposed to ultraviolet radiation. This can cause genetic mutations, which is why excessive sun exposure can cause skin cancer. Another theory holds that the ability to distinguish light and dark evolved to limit exposure to tissue-damaging free radicals (the same reason an apple left out goes brown). Levels of oxygen-free radicals rise in sunlight. This ability evolved into sleep, although quite why it remains essential for life isn't fully understood.

FT often recounts curious incidents of sleepwalking. Indeed, up to one in 50 adults sleepwalk. One of Leschziner's

patients put on a helmet and rode her BSA 250 – not the quietest motorcycle – for about 20 minutes while asleep. She returned the bike to the place she'd left it and had no recollection of her night-time ride. After several other nocturnal runs, she sold the bike. Another patient crouched on the end of a friend's bed at 3am and tried to order a pizza using a shoe as a telephone.

Leschziner doesn't just present a cornucopia of curious cases. He provides a well-written, up-to-date and accessible introduction to the biological basis of these often enigmatic conditions. We've known since the 1950s that dreams occur during rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. More recently, researchers realised that we also dream during non-REM sleep. REM dreams tend to tell a story. Non-REM dreams

typically contain simple images of, for instance, objects, people and animals. Non-REM dream images can, when mixed with strong emotions, be disturbing: spikes coming

down from the ceiling, insect infestations and sharing the bed with snakes.

Sceptics often roll out sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations as explanations for phenomena as diverse as ghosts, astral projection and other out-of-body experiences, and visits from aliens, incubi and succubi. Biologically, Leschziner explains, sleep paralysis arises from a “failure to disengage wake from REM sleep”. During REM sleep almost all our muscles – other than those that keep us alive – are essentially paralysed. This “failure to disengage” also allows aspects of REM sleep to ‘bleed’ into our full awareness, which also helps account for vivid hypnagogic visions as we drift off and other

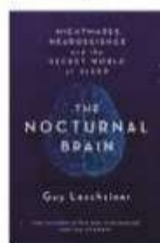
nocturnal hallucinations. One of Leschziner's patients reported seeing “millions and millions and millions of eyes [...] floating in the room”.

We seem to have a 3D image of our bodies hardwired in our mind, which is one reason phantom pain arises. Some researchers believe we may ‘project’ this representation onto emotional pathways and the visual circuits, giving rise to hypnagogic visits from incubi and succubi, which are typically characterised by sleep paralysis.

Leschziner's book left me wondering if a similar process may contribute to some alien and fairy ‘abductions’. Perhaps emotionally laden representations primed by cultural and social factors could project onto the brain and the visual circuits. I've experienced sleep paralysis and out-of-body sensations a handful of times and they're certainly strange and peculiar. I doubt, however, if sleep paralysis and hypnagogic hallucinations account fully for these complex phenomena.

Leschziner covers many other fortean mainstays, such as Phineas Gage, ‘gaslighting’ (where a person tries to manipulate a victim by making them doubt their memory, perceptions and sanity), Charles Bonnet syndrome and lucid dreaming. He also highlights the need for further research into many areas of sleep; most fundamentally, perhaps, why we dream. There are many theories and dreaming probably has more than one biological function. But as Leschziner notes: “if you think about it, this is staggering. Something that is fundamental to the human experience, that we all do on a nightly basis [...] remains a mystery”. Yet this book also demonstrates that we're closer to understanding this enigmatic, but essential, fact of life.

Mark Greener



One researcher's journal

This is neither history nor journalism; it is, though, a bold, smart, thoughtfully argued addition to a continually developing argument

Forbidden Science, Volume Four

Journals 1990–1999:
The Spring Hill Chronicles

Jacques Vallee

Documantica Research 2019

Hb, 551pp, illus., notes, ind., \$45, ISBN 978-0-578-08712

A note from my friend Jacques Vallee reminds me that *Forbidden Science: Vol. 4*, like the previous volumes (reviewed in FT364:59–61), is to be read as a diary, not as an argument.

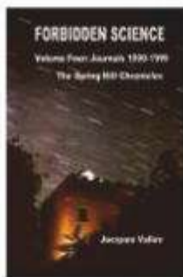
That's good advice, though I suspect that only readers able to separate an emphatically expressed opinion from an empirical certainty are likely to heed it. As a unique, original thinker, and the smartest guy in most rooms where ufologists congregate, Vallee is formidable. He does not suffer fools gladly, fools sometimes defined as those whose own reading of the UFO phenomenon presumes to differ from his. That habit may be irritating, but if *FS4*'s pages don't always please, a knowledgeable reader can only admire the author's boldness. Here Vallee chronicles his 1990s, a decade given to broad enthusiasms, notably abduction and crashed-saucer claims, that while failing to deliver on initial promises never made their ultimate meanings unambiguously apparent either.

Neither history nor journalism, *FS4* should be read as one man's perspective – and since that man is Vallee, it's bound to be interesting. Still, as one who actively participated in the UFO world in the same decade, I can attest that he gets some things so wrong as to be unrecognisable, for example, nearly everything he writes, surmises, imagines or fears about doings in Chicago and at the Center for UFO Studies

(CUFOS), the target of much of his ire.

Living in Chicago and serving on the CUFOS board and as editor of its magazine, I was present when organisational decisions were hammered out. (I moved in 1989 but returned to attend meetings and to research my multi-volume *UFO Encyclopedia*.) I enjoyed countless discussions with CUFOS figures such as its scientific director, sociologist Mark Rodeghier, environmental scientist Michael Swords, folklorist Eddie Bullard, bibliographer George M Eberhart, and the late psychologist Stuart Appelle, among others. This was an intellectually sophisticated crowd. Vallee's odd intimations notwithstanding, no sinister government agency shaped or influenced our actions, publications and conclusions. In the unlikely event any had tried, the resistance would have been fierce. CUFOS also published the referee'd *Journal of UFO Studies (JUFOS)*, which attracted contributions from academics outside our field.

For all his antipathy to ufology generally and CUFOS specifically, Vallee seems not to have read the period's best writing and research. (*JUFOS*, for example, is never mentioned.) As one who – in the course of my work on the *Encyclopedia* as well as from decades' prior experience – has probably read as much historical ufology literature as anyone breathing, I can state that Vallee's understanding of the ufology subculture and its leading personalities, many of whom I have known, is often narrow and blinkered. Some individuals were indeed “idiots” (Vallee's characterisation); others were



nothing of the sort.

A short review is not the place to detail these matters. But it occurs to me that one of the ufologies – there is no single entity ufology, but rather many,

with conflicting approaches, convictions, and methodologies sound and unsound – is the one that an observer sees and experiences in California, where Vallee lives. It helps that Vallee remains more French than American. My thoroughly American experience is mostly with colleagues in the Midwest and on the East Coast, whose perspectives, it seems, are quite different. Even in the modern age of communication, distance and geography matter.

So in the end *FS4*, like its predecessors, is an argument. How could it not be? The UFO phenomenon generates unceasing disagreements, each following from one's sense of the possible or one's view of what in the data matters and what doesn't. After a lifetime of this curious pursuit, I am in awe of our continuing ignorance, and perhaps more tolerant than Vallee of views with which I may disagree but which I respect if they are thoughtfully argued, as they are in the hands of the intelligent and reasonable among us.

His contributions to UFO study equal anybody's in their scope and insight. *FS4* is a commendably open portrayal of the man, his strengths and flaws in full, brave view. If you care about this subject, you had better read it. Keep in mind, though, that everything written about it, including everything by Vallee and his occasional critic Jerome Clark, is no more than the latest instalment in an argument with no end in sight.

Jerome Clark

★★★★★

Haunted

Horror of Haverfordwest

GL Davies

Sixth Books 2018

Pb, 229pp, £11.99, ISBN 9781785358432

This is a gripping account of an extremely haunted house in Pembrokeshire, West Wales, and the torment suffered by two couples who lived there at different times during the last 30 years. They experienced shadow people, dog-headed men, horrid smells, sudden temperature drops, poltergeist activity, hideous crones (was this an ‘Old Hag’ sleep paralysis nightmare, or genuine supernatural apparition?), animal cruelty, incest and a great deal more unpleasantness besides.

The cumulative effect places incredible strain upon each couple's relationship, with two very different outcomes. One pair remain together, having departed the haunted house – the other couple are less fortunate.

The author intelligently considers the psychological aspects of such cases, including a potential link between depression and paranormal activity. In addition to polts, ghosts or demonic possession, he proposes alternative explanations for the alleged phenomena. Mental illness, toxic mould and parallel dimensions are all suggested, as is secret military technology (the area has long been known for its UFO sightings, sometimes associated with nearby RAF and naval bases).

An interview-style narrative device, allowing each protagonist to describe events from their own perspective, gives additional credence to this incredible, *Amityville Horror*-like tale. And the frequent everyday details with which the book is peppered also help to convince: popping out to the supermarket, having a cup of tea, a pint with the lads, watching sport on TV.

This is a compelling and disturbing chronicle of what happens when ordinary people are subjected to extraordinary events.

Christopher Josiffe

★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

The Ghost Studies

Brandon Massullo

New Page Books 2017
Pb, 191pp, notes, ind, \$15.99, ISBN 9781632651211

Massullo, a parapsychologist and clinical therapist, provides a fresh overview of the current state of research into paranormal experiences. He admits that those who seek answers to the many questions the subject raises are facing a “selfless job” in which “the money is crap and so are the hours”. The result, however, in his case is very worthwhile. His review seems focused and thorough, up-to-date and explained clearly. As a therapist he applies a positive approach to those who have such experiences – ghostly encounters are prominent here – helping them understand and process their experience. On the whole he finds that the initial confusions and anxiety soon give way to positive life-affirming views.

The Human Experiment

David Stokes

Privately published via Amazon Books 2017
Pb, 299pp, price unknown, ISBN 9781521944493

This book almost parallels Massullo’s (above). Stokes is an author and mental health worker in London, who counsels his patients with a close and personal interaction in which he tries to help them understand the sources of their confusion and anxiety.

He draws widely from Western occultism, native shamanic practices and an acknowledgement of meaningful coincidences. Stokes, here, shows how his method is achieving success and praise in a profession that is underfunded and under-appreciated.

The Jaynes Legacy

Lawrence Wile

Imprint-Academic Inc 2018
Pb, 291pp, bib, ind, £14.95, ISBN 9781845409227

The publication of Julian Jaynes’s *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* in 1972 stimulated “an unsettling ambivalence” in the academy that continues today.

Even Richard Dawkins could not make up his mind on it, describing it as “either complete rubbish or a work of consummate genius, nothing in between”.

Wiles – a doctor with degrees in physics and philosophy, and interests in psychiatry and neurology – tries to explain Jaynes’s thesis in relation to such topics as consciousness as a property of matter, of protoplasm, of behaviourism etc, and seems to argue that consciousness may not be necessary for the basic processes of learning, thinking and reasoning.

According to Jaynes, until human consciousness emerged around 3,000 years ago, “hallucinations, poetry and civilisations were merely nonconscious reactivity”. Of course, this contradicts the modern idea of consciousness as continuous, gradual evolution from worms to men.

Wiles shows that the thread-like structure of Reissner’s fibres in the brain, which degenerated 100,000 years ago, could have resulted in the emergence of consciousness. Wiles’ most interesting argument proposes that this process has left traces in the mystical traditions of many ancient cultures.

A difficult, complex and profoundly important theory, well-argued and explained clearly.

New Genesis

Wojciech K Kulczyk

New Genesis Foundation 2017
Pb, 228pp, illus, notes, gloss, \$12.95, ISBN 9781999906009

A physicist ponders the question of how life began on Earth and developed over time, a small question but one with an enormous implication for the complex interdependency that we see today of consciousness, creatures, cultures, resources and energy.

Unlike the Jaynes/Wile book, the author gives greater attention to the physical and biological processes of the progress towards consciousness. Again, unlike Jaynes/Wile, Kulczyk finds all the known processes failing to properly account for the appearance of consciousness. Instead,

the last portion of the book looks towards the stars and alien intervention.

It’s a good, thoughtful read and asks some intelligent questions.

Occulture

Carl Abrahamsson

Park Street Press 2018
Pb, 272pp, notes, bib, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781620557037

Abrahamsson is well positioned to chronicle the history of this neologism and the movement it represents.

In his youth he was attracted to the occult-based art, music and magical rhetoric made more culturally visible by the likes of Thee Temple of Psychic Youth; the revival of interest in Crowley, Burroughs, Spare and others; filmmakers like Jarman; and modern adaptations of alchemy, shamanism, Kabbala, Hermetic philosophy, parapsychology, sex and drugs (to name but a few of its strands). Abrahamsson later joined its organisation, and still later began touring with lectures, films and books. This anthology of his writing and talks looks back at the stages of the burgeoning ‘occulture’ – the revealed effect upon social culture of the arts, sciences, music and literature as they are, in turn, transformed by various theories of magic and occultism. The term is, today, used widely, both in the academic field and in pop culture, suitably reflected in the argument over who invented the term: Genesis P-Orridge or Professor Christopher Partridge.

As a commentary on the effect of various occult movements upon society generally this is an entertaining and eye-opening study, and all the more important for presenting the view from outside the strict social anthropology of academic scholarship.

Psychic Dreaming

Lloyd Auerbach

Llewellyn Books 2017
Pb, 257pp, bib, \$16.99, ISBN 9780738751702

Auerbach, a veteran parapsychologist and writer, is always interesting as is this broad survey

of the uses of dreaming in New Age USA.

From experiences of reincarnation, crime and other problem solving, telepathy, clairvoyance, remote viewing and precognition to overcoming stress and fears, he presents clearly the methods used to induce and interpret them. However, because the book concentrates on ‘dreamwork’ as a modern phenomenon, it feels pretty lightweight by lacking any historical depth. It could have mentioned, for example, a great deal more about the ancient Græco-Roman use of ‘incubation’ at hero shrines to induce dream encounters with the gods.

Nor is there any mention of the great ‘psychic questing’ adventures from the early career of Andrew Collins and team in the late 1970s.

As Andy mentions on his own website, his use of dreams, coincidences and “creative intuition” was inspired by the fantastic tales of Tibetan *terma* in which such methods were used to find long-lost holy relics and scriptures.

Empire Of Enchantment
The Story of Indian Magic

John Zubrzycki

Hurst Books 2018
Hb, 384pp, notes, bib, £25.00, ISBN 9781849049443

This competent and detailed study begins with the Victorian fad for Western stage magicians to outdo each other by posing as Indian adepts with increasingly bizarre “orientalised” performances. Zubrzycki then voyages through time following the various ‘tricks’ to their origins in the legendary feats of yogis and sadhus, the court magicians to Indian royalty, and through mythology to the magical powers of the djinn and ancient gods. Resurrections, levitation, beds of nails, cobra fascinations, accelerated plant growth, fire-walking and, of course, the famous ‘rope-trick’ are featured.

Zubrzycki’s writing keeps you reading, but the real magic is the window he opens onto history and the role of staged magic in India itself and the amazing performances that were recorded in historical documents.

REVIEWS / FILMS

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.



Somewhere in Time

Dir Jeannot Szwarc, USA 1980
Final Cut, £12.99 (Blu-ray)

Some films are box office smashes, some are box office flops, and some do okay but are quickly forgotten. Then there are films which at the time seem unremarkable but are nevertheless fondly remembered. Not cult films exactly, but films which simply strike a chord with more people than you might think. *Somewhere in Time* is one such film.

Fine, you might say, but what's a slushy romance doing in *Fortean Times*? A fair question – but actually the film's *fortean* credentials are impeccable, dealing as it does with time travel, time loops, and premonitions; and it comes from the pen of Richard Matheson (it's based on his novel *Bid Time Return*), a towering figure in the field of science-fiction and horror writing. The film's central character is Richard Collier (Christopher Reeve), whom we first meet in 1972 at the opening night of his first play. During the aftershow party Collier is approached by an elderly lady who presses an antique pocket watch into his hands and says, "Come back to me" before leaving. Eight years later and Collier is now a successful playwright, albeit one suffering writer's block. Figuring he needs a break, he decides on impulse to stay at the famous Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island in Michigan. Wandering through the hotel's Hall of History he is entranced by the photograph of a

The film deals with time travel, time loops and premonitions

young woman whom he learns was Elise McKenna (Jane Seymour), a renowned stage actress who once performed there. Digging further, he is astounded to discover that she was the woman who had given him the pocket watch. He meets McKenna's former assistant, who shows him the actress's personal effects, among which is a model of the Grand Hotel and a copy of a book about time travel. Collier becomes convinced that they must have met before and determines to will himself back in time to make it happen.

A classic, intriguing Matheson premise, then, but uncharacteristically one which serves not as the foundation for a wild sci-fi tale but for an overwhelmingly romantic impossible love story. Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour are perfectly cast: he was a fine actor, with a charm and sensitivity that work well here. Seymour is, frankly, not the world's greatest actress but in playing an elegant object of affection that would draw a man out of his own time, she couldn't be bettered.

Aside from the writing and the performances, the one element which lifts the film into another realm is the music. The repeated use of the 18th variation of Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a*

theme of Paganini is sublime, of course, but where the producers really lucked out was in snagging John Barry to compose the score. Barry was always at his best in writing romantic music with an air of melancholy – think *Out of Africa* or *Robin and Marian* – and here, inspired by the material, he produced what some argue is his very finest work.

As you can probably tell, I love

it. I quite readily admit that it's not a *great* film: it is sometimes a bit slushy and some of the photography is so intentionally hazy that at times the whole enterprise veers close to Mills & Boon territory, prompting the occasional thought of "I shouldn't be enjoying this". And yet people do. Lots of them. There is even a fan club. The reason for that is because in its unashamed appeal to the heart it's a film that transcends its own limitations and the vagaries of fashion to, ironically enough, achieve a timelessness of its own.

Daniel King



Tom's Midnight Garden

Dir Christine Secombe, UK 1988
Second Sight, £19.99 (DVD)

The DVD of the BBC's 1988 six-part version of *Tom's Midnight Garden* is a joy to watch.

Tom (Jeremy Rampling), a boy of nine or 10, is sent off to stay with his Uncle Alan and Aunt Gwen near Ely, because his brother Peter has measles. He's in quarantine, so he can't go out anywhere, and is prepared to be bored. From the first episode, when Tom complains that a fortnight is years, and his uncle says "Time is purely relative", there is questioning about the nature of time.

His aunt and uncle live in a flat in a converted old house owned by the elderly Mrs Bartholomew, who lives upstairs. Tom's disappointed that there isn't even a garden;

the house's original garden was sold off for modern housing, and there's only a small yard with dustbins and an old motorbike.

An antique grandfather clock in the hall tells the time but is "totally unreliable when it comes to striking", and when Tom discovers that at midnight it strikes 13 he creeps downstairs, opens the back door – and discovers a huge, sunlit garden. Back in the house everything is old-fashioned; a maid walks right past him but doesn't see him; the grandfather clock still stands against the wall.

Over the next two weeks Tom slips into the garden in his pyjamas every night, and meets a girl, Hatty (Caroline Waldron), who is (almost) the only one who can see him. She pretends to be a princess, but is an orphan; her unpleasant aunt calls her "a charity child, a pauper", and asks why she ever took her in. Hatty's cousins mostly don't want to play with her, and she and Tom become good friends. Each thinks the other is a ghost, but Tom gradually comes to realise that Hatty had lived in the house years before, in late-Victorian times. Over the nights of his visits to the garden Hatty becomes older; at one point she complains, "Sometimes it's months before you come again."

The earlier scenes in the garden are all in spring and summer; the later ones are in winter, and Hatty is skating. Tom persuades her to leave her skates, when she's not using them, in her secret hiding place under the floorboards of what is both his bedroom now and hers, decades ago. He finds them there, and takes them with him that night, and they go skating together, Tom noting the paradox that they are wearing the same skates! But Hatty is older now, a young woman – and courting a young man, Barty.

On his final night Tom goes through the back door at midnight, and trips over the bins in the yard. In despair, he calls out Hatty's name, and the disturbance wakes old Mrs Bartholomew. The following day, Tom and Mrs Bartholomew talk about the adventures they had each time they met, when she was dreaming of the garden of her childhood.

Philippa Pearce's original 1958 novel is a classic children's time travel story, with all the tropes of



the genre: a child sent to stay with relatives in an old house; timeslips (with one explanation or another); a lonely child in the present, an unhappy child in the past; an object that links present and past – here the grandfather clock.

One difference with *Tom's Midnight Garden* is that Tom's nightly visits are months apart for Hatty; she grows up from a girl of about his age to a young woman in the fortnight of his visiting the garden. Director Christine Secombe mentions in the 10-minute "Look Back" feature that they'd deliberately chosen an actress who could play Hatty as both a child and a young woman. (It's reminiscent of Robert Nathan's novel *A Portrait of Jennie* (1940), which the BBC adapted as a haunting *Boy Meets Girl* play in 1969 and sadly seems to have been wiped; a struggling artist encounters a young girl (Anna Calder-Marshall) who is a year or two older each time he sees her over a few months until they finally meet in the present day at the end of the story.)

The BBC rendering of *Tom's Midnight Garden* is beautifully produced; the garden is almost a character in its own right, and the often slightly awkward relationship between Tom and Hatty is a delight – though at times the acting of Tom is a little too young and overdone. The adult actors have the stiltedness that often comes from filming a story set in the 1950s some 30 years later; just how should mothers and aunts and uncles speak to a child? But this isn't their story; it's the story of the friendship across half a century between two lonely children, and of the mutability of time.

David V Barrett



The Twilight Zone

US 1959-1964
Mediumrare Entertainment, £44.99 (DVD), £49.99 (Blu-ray) £149.99 (Limited Edition, available at www.thetwilightzone.co.uk)

What is there left to say about *The Twilight Zone*? Not a lot. We're just shy of the 60th anniversary of the broadcast of the very first episode, and in that time the show has rightly come to be regarded as a landmark in television history. Not only that, but it has become part

of popular culture and everyday life: even without ever having seen an episode, everyone knows the theme tune, and everyone knows the right moments at which to hum it. That in itself is quite remarkable but the reason it has passed into the vernacular is simply because it is of such incredibly high quality. I was sent Season 1 Disc 2 to review and on that one disc of this 23 disc set we find directors such as John Brahm, Robert Florey and Stuart Rosenberg and performers such as Richard Conte, Rod Taylor, Jim Hutton, Steve Cochran and Nehemiah Persoff. Those names might not mean a great deal to today's viewer, but let me tell you that these were all exceptionally talented people. And let's not forget the composers: the great Bernard Herrmann and Jerry Goldsmith, among many others, are featured here. In one of the supporting featurettes, it is made clear that identifying and hiring the right talent was a crucial part of *The Twilight Zone's* success.

But of course, the single most influential figure associated with the show was its creator and chief writer Rod Serling, one of the best TV dramatists there has ever been. What some fans may not know is that Serling had established his stellar reputation long before *The Twilight Zone* was even an idea, let alone a reality – he had won three Emmy awards for straight TV dramas *Patterns*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight* and *The Comedian* – or that his move into fantasy/sci-fi was motivated by a desire to sneak social themes on to TV screens under the noses of the network executives and sponsors who had previously meddled with his writing when they thought it might turn out to be controversial.

This anniversary set boasts excellent transfers and a disc of new extras, including a 90-minute documentary about Serling's life – well worth a look, as he was a fascinating man – and a 30-minute documentary more specifically about *The Twilight Zone*. It has some interesting talking heads – directors Joe Dante and Wes Craven among them – but does repeat a lot of information from the feature. Overall, as a chance to own every episode in excellent quality this set is really too good an opportunity to pass up.

Daniel King



SHORTS

LAURA

Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Dual Format)

Detective Mark McPherson investigates the murder of glamorous ad executive Laura Hunt, only to find that things are not as they seem. Haunted by a painting of Laura, and drawing on the testimony of figures from her life, McPherson pieces together the story that led to the corpse in Laura's apartment. Dana Andrews is great in an unshowy performance as the solid McPherson, the fixed point orbited by the colourful cast. Gene Tierney makes for a very believable Laura, not a femme fatale but a woman surrounded by fatality, Vincent Price is convincingly slippery as Laura's unfaithful fiancé, and there is a glorious performance from Clifton Webb as gossip columnist Waldo Lydecker. Webb takes the choicest morsels from the sharp script, but everyone gets some fizzing dialogue. It's a simple tale, and the mystery of whodunnit and why is not particularly difficult, but the film is elevated by its winning cast, lively screenplay and gorgeous (Oscar-winning) cinematography. **Martin Parsons** ★★★★★

HUMAN DESIRE

Altitude, £5.99 (DVD)

Jeff (Glenn Ford) returns to his job as a train engineer after three years' fighting in Korea and becomes embroiled in a war of the heart in Fritz Lang's adaptation of Emile Zola's *La Bête Humaine*. Jeff's colleague Carl persuades his wife to use a family connection to secure him a job but is then consumed by jealousy, leading to a dark spiral of murder and deception. While softened slightly from the novel, this is still a tale of uncompromising brutality about the cheapness of life when it stands in the way of human desire. Lang's microscope-sharp direction is the perfect match for Zola's dissection of humanity: the film is heavy with a dark passion, the kind of love that makes people hurt one another. The rumbling of the trains in the background underscores this trembling, febrile emotion, which cannot help but erupt into violence. **MP** ★★★★★

CUJO

Eureka Entertainment, £21.99 (Limited Edition Blu-ray)

1983 was arguably the year that saw the floodgates open when it came to Stephen King on the big screen. Following on from the widely praised, and widely spaced, adaptations by De Palma (*Carrie*, 1976) and Kubrick (*The Shining*, 1980), this year saw a trio of less prestigious adaptations: David Cronenberg's superb *The Dead Zone*, John Carpenter's serviceable *Christine* and Lewis Teague's oft-forgotten *Cujo*. The latter film has received considerably less love over the years than the other members of the Class of '83 – perhaps the premise of a mother and son besieged by a rabid St Bernard dog just didn't have a wide enough appeal. It's no masterpiece, but Eureka's definitive, extra-laden release provides a welcome opportunity to reassess the movie. *Cujo* is, in hindsight, a pleasingly small-scale piece of chamber horror that subjects the modern, middle-class nuclear family to an onslaught of drooling, suppurating nastiness in the form of the eponymous mutt-gone-bad. Like other classic creatures, from Kong to Frankenstein's monster, poor old Cujo elicits more than a little of the viewer's sympathy: he's not evil, just an angry bundle of pain and misunderstanding, a disavowed, festering wound at the heart of a modern America trapped in its own consumerist nightmare. The film's real targets are the adults in the room, the ambitious ad exec dad and bored, cheating wife, who tell their young son not only that the monster he believes lives in his closet is a figment of his imagination, but *that there are no monsters*. And as all of us know – Stephen King more than others – this is simply not true. **David Sutton** ★★★★★



SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called 'the airwaves'.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore 'pirate' pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality 'spoken word' content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of 'legitimate' broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: The Last Podcast on the Left

www.lastpodcastontheleft.com

Hosts: Ben Kissel, Marcus Parks, Henry Zebrowski

Episode Count: 350+

Format: Dark comedy, discussion

Established: 2011

Frequency: Weekly, every Friday

Topics: Everything fortean and more...

A warning: *The Last Podcast on the Left* is not for everyone (given the title is based on a notorious Wes Craven gore movie, that's maybe to be expected). The website promises that the show "covers all the horrors our world has to offer, both imagined and real. From demons and slashers to cults and serial killers, *The Last Podcast* is guaranteed to satisfy your blood lust."

Presented by a raucous trio of American comedians, *The Last Podcast* is a loud, scabrous show full of not-safe-for-work

(or many homes) language, character impressions, and off-the-wall roleplaying. The ringmaster is Ben Kissel, whose job seems to be to drag the other two presenters back on topic when things threaten to get out of hand. Marcus Parks is the horror fan, obsessed by cryptids and crime, while Henry Zebrowski is the show's almost uncontrollable id: conspiracy theorist, part-time Satanist and occasional actor (he's in Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street*).

The boys' website says it best: "*Last Podcast on the Left* barrels headlong into all things horror as hosts Ben Kissel, Marcus Parks and Henry Zebrowski cover dark subjects spanning Jeffrey Dahmer, werewolves, Jonestown, iconic hauntings, the history of war crimes, and more. Whether it's cults, killers, or cryptid encounters, *Last Podcast on the Left* laughs into the abyss that is the dark side of humanity."

On the website, shows are conveniently collected under subject headings for ease of access. With over 350 individual main episodes and all sorts of 'side stories', it can be difficult to find what you might be in the mood for. Subject headers include: Aliens, Horrors of Reality, Conspiracy, Cults and Religions, Monsters and Cryptids, Satanism and the

Occult, Ghosts, Serial Killers, and several more – essentially, all of forteana can be found here.

Your initial impression, especially if you listen to some early episodes, might be of a show swamped by absurdist humour that threatens to spiral out of control. However, as time went on the *Last Podcast* trio gained experience, and beneath the surface there is a lot of depth to their excavations of the most bizarre subjects.

For the first 50 or so episodes they hit all the obvious topics – UFOs, aliens, the pyramids, Satanism, religion, ghosts, the occult, MK Ultra, and serial killers. These episodes then gave way to multi-part deep dives into subjects that could not be covered in the usual 40-minute or so runtime. The earliest multi-part subjects include the BTK Killer, Satanic Ritual Abuse, and Unsolved Serial Murders. A three-parter delves into the life and crimes of Jeffrey Dahmer (episodes 122-124), while Charles Manson also gets a trio of instalments (episodes 147-149). Later multi-installment epic shows include Ed Gein (episodes 172-174), Henry Lee Lucas (episodes 182-185, four segments), and HH Holmes (episodes 200-202), among others.

In between these serial shows, there's plenty of room for one-offs on such topics as the mysterious intergalactic object 'Oumuamua (an 8 Nov 2018 'Side Stories' instalment), the Flat Earth theory (episode 334), the Jersey Devil (episode 314), the 'lost continent' of Lemuria (episode 297), and the Travis Walton 'fire in the sky' UFO abduction case (episode 284).

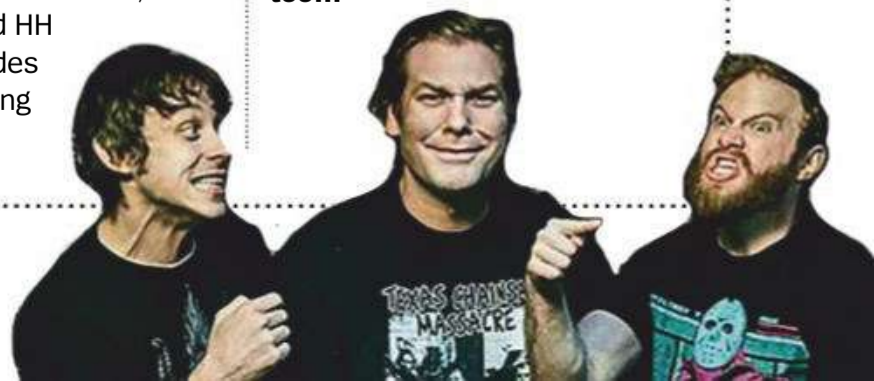
As time went on, subjects seemed to demand an even more in-depth treatment, resulting in a five-episode binge on Jack the Ripper (episodes 254-258) and a superbly detailed five-episode examination of the Jonestown massacre (episodes 300-304). What these shows prove (with each instalment coming in at around an hour) is that behind the goofery and dirty humour, *The Last Podcast* does take the research and exploration of its chosen subjects seriously. There's no reason these things shouldn't be hugely entertaining, but the show will only work for you so long as 'adult humour' is also your thing.

Strengths: The long, multi-part explorations of fortean subjects can be rewarding, while the off-the-wall humour is entertaining

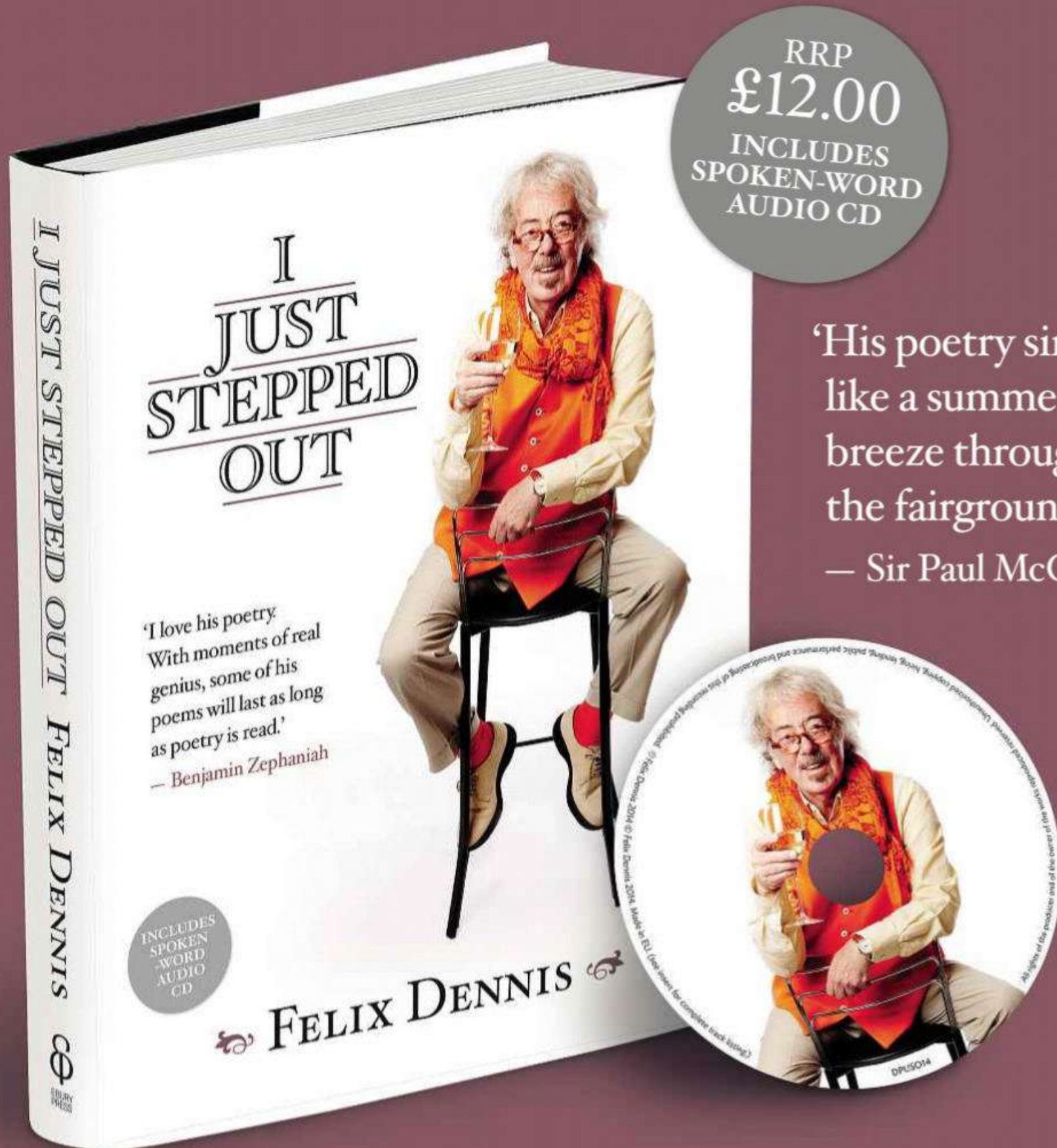
Weaknesses: In some episodes the fun and japes can overwhelm the material (especially early on), and Kissel can find it difficult to rein in his co-presenters.

Recommended Episodes: #208: David Bowie and the Occult; #216/217: Roswell; #233: The Secret Space Programme; #254-#258: Jack the Ripper (five episodes); #310-#313: Rasputin; #261-#264: L Ron Hubbard and Scientology.

Verdict: It may be an acquired taste for some, but *The Last Podcast on the Left* proves that forteans can have a scabrous sense of humour too...



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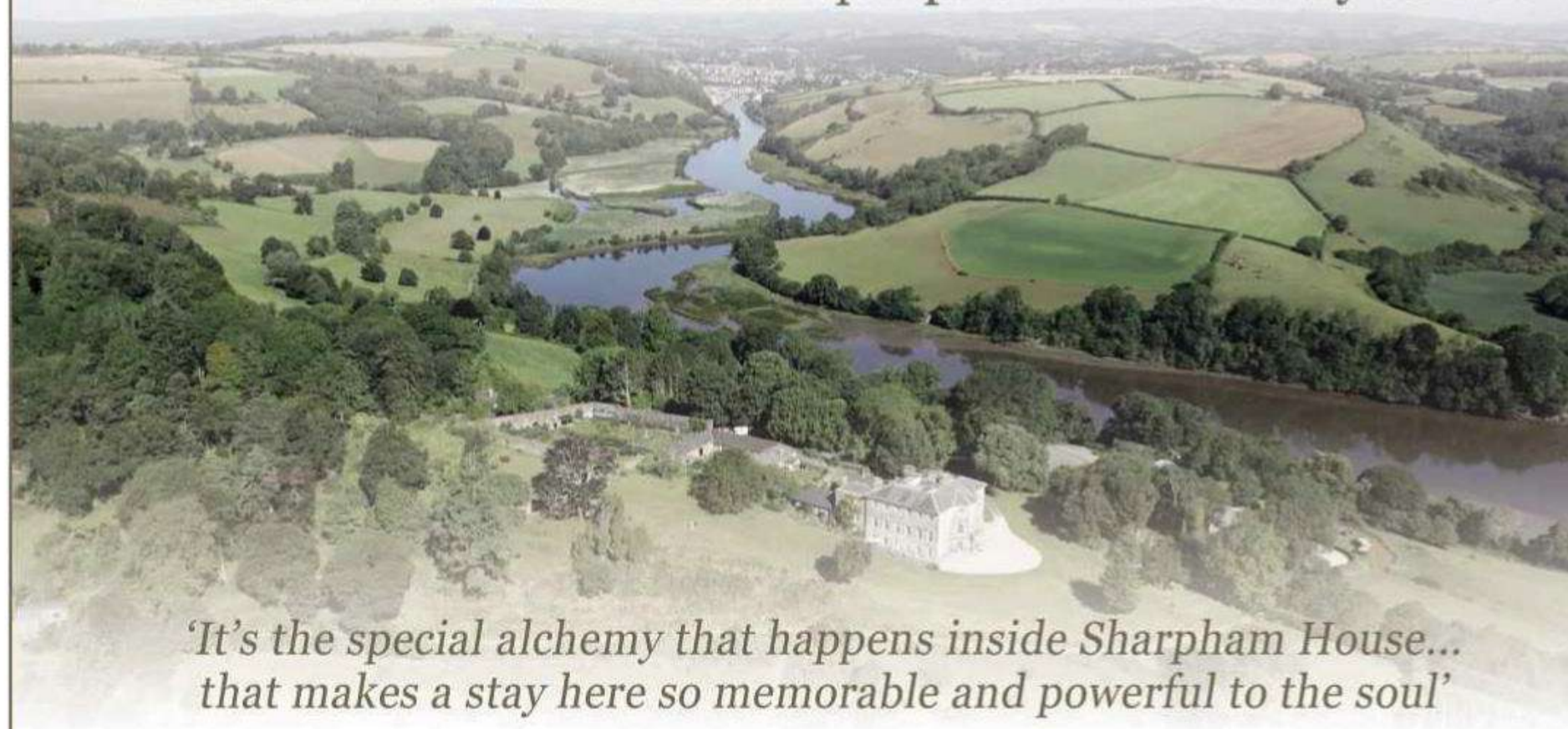
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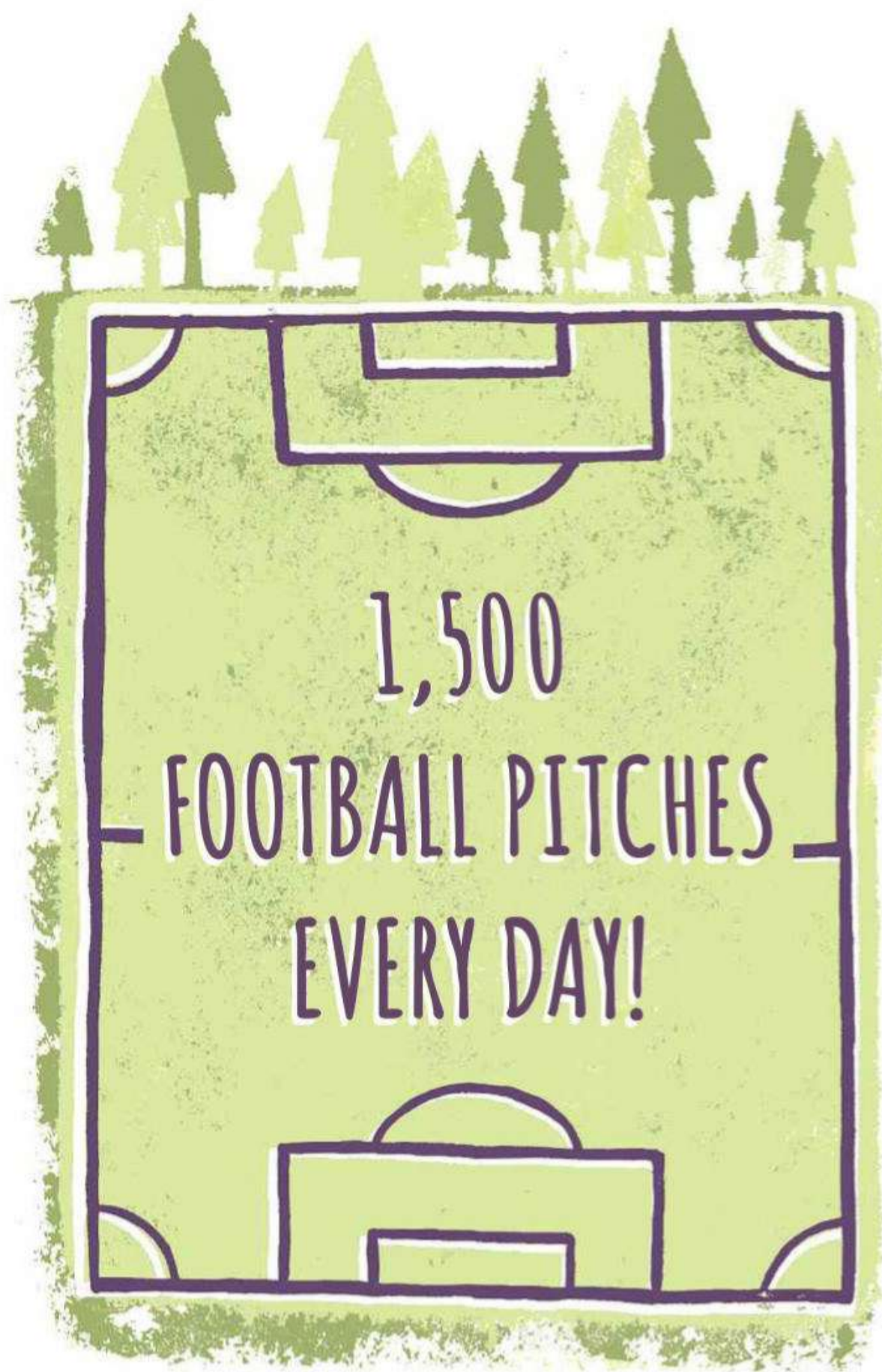


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LETTERS

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Falling amphibians

“When the rainbow fails to hold back the water, then it rains hard, and a quantity of frogs and toads falls down.’ It is interesting to note the belief in the ‘rain of frogs and toads’ among these Indians corresponding to that of Europeans. It may possibly be of Old Testament origin.” This is a quotation from *Naskapi: The Savage Hunters of the Labrador Peninsula*, by FG Speck, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935, p. 64).

Speck recorded this information among the Naskapi, an Innu nation of eastern Canada.

Marinus van der Sluijs
Vancouver, Canada

Biting beavers

Your “Extra! Extra!” headline “Crayfish tears off own claw to escape hot soup” [FT377:5] has a precursor in Juvenal. In lines 34f. of his 12th Satire he refers to the belief, also mentioned by Æsop, Pliny the Elder, Tertullian, Isidore of Seville and Gerald of Wales, that beavers bite off their own testicles in the knowledge they are prized for a drug called castoreum. Sir Thomas Browne refuted this fallacy in his work of 1646, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, an ancestor of FT’s Mythconceptions.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Otorobot

Regarding SD Tucker’s suggestion (“Turkey in Tinfoil”, FT376:49) that ‘Otorobot’ translates as “Ottoman-Robot, presumably”: in Turkish, *oto* is a loanword, a phonetic spelling of *auto*. Otorobot, then, has nothing to do with the Ottomans and would best be translated as car robot, which makes intuitive sense as the statue resembles a generic entry in the Transformers franchise, home of Optimus Prime and the other Autobots.

Jarett Kobek
Los Angeles, California

Bolting his food

Regarding the claim [FT375:44] that Gladstone “famously recommended to his grandchildren that, when eating meals, they should chew each mouthful 32 times, ‘one

SIMULACRA CORNER



Roadside wizard

Rob Bray sent us this photo, commenting: “I drive past this old wizard on the road from Greens Norton to Blakesley (South Northamptonshire) every week and I always wonder what kind of spell he’s casting on the road with those bony fingers.”

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteanimes.com.

for every tooth”: in ‘As We Say in Our House’: a Book of Family Sayings (Robson Books, 2001), Nigel Rees writes: “W.E. Gladstone, four times Liberal prime minister in the late nineteenth century, was held up as an example to countless generations of children as the man who did this tedious thing [chewed every mouthful 32 times]. In the BBC TV programme *As I Remember* (30 April 1967), Baroness Asquith (Lady Violet Bonham Carter) gave an eyewitness account of the Grand Old Man’s jaw in action. She recalled having had a meal with Gladstone when she was a little girl, but – horrors! – he did no such thing. Quite the reverse in fact: *he bolted his food*. Confirmation of this deplorable fact also came in a lecture given by George Lyttelton at Hawarden (Gladstone’s old home) on 24 June 1955: ‘More than one lynx-eyed young spectator [has discovered] that Mr Gladstone did not chew every mouthful thirty-two times... though I am not sure that Mr Gladstone himself might not have made some weighty and useful observations on the common and deplorable gap between

principle and practice.”

• In ‘Heavenly views’ [FT375:8] you refer to a correspondent writing in about “a long pole sticking up through the clouds”, but that the reference currently eluded you. It was in fact a letter from Danny Cheveaux, describing what looked like a “huge brown pole” above the clouds, seen from an aircraft a few minutes out of Manchester on 12 January 1997. He wrote: “After about two or three minutes, the object looked longer and was at more of an angle.” The letter was accompanied, not by a sketch, but by two photographs [FT102:54, Sept 1997].

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Roll out the barrel

Regarding the examples of hyperpedestrianism [FT376:36-41], there were also many who cruised not the whole world, but more localised circuits. They added an extra to attract attention. The *New Zealand Herald* on 14 February 1927, reporting from Berlin, has a

piece on the “Beer Barrel Heroes. Rolling Around Germany. Teuton Imagination Roused.” A message from Solingen says two Germans inside a huge 13cwt (660kg) barrel rolled beneath decorated arches to the market place in Homberg and thus completed the freak escapade of “rolling, around Germany”. All the people in the town turned out to greet the ‘heroes’, who had stirred the imagination of everyone in Germany. The story leaves to the imagination the explanation of the way the barrel was propelled, or how its occupants endured the constant bumpy rotation. The completion of the feat gave the village an excuse for emptying many other barrels in honour of the ‘heroes’.

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

I am left wondering if there was a link between the original Masked Walker of the early 20th century [FT378:40-44], and the individual who was seen walking around south-west London in autumn 1997, wearing a crash helmet and visor, while pushing a pram completely enclosed from view. I actually saw this myself in Streatham. The walker was slowly pushing a pram down the high street exactly as described. People were looking and actually moving away, perhaps because they felt uncomfortable. One of the locals who drank at my regular pub had witnessed this and claimed that he had heard baby noises coming from the pram. He wondered if the walker was trying to conceal a disabled or deformed child. Was the contemporary walker paying homage to the original?

Was it a prank by someone with too much time on his or her hands? Or was there a more sinister purpose, as an FT correspondent felt at the time?

Phil Brand
London

Paul Sieveking notes: In 1998 I reported on Harry Bensley, the 1908 pedestrian, quoting the Guardian and D.Mail of 29 July 1998, which gave different details from those of Jan Bondeson – for instance that he became a councillor in Wivenhoe, Essex, and died in Brighton in 1970 [FT116:10].

LETTERS

Leprosy and decapitation

It was a great coincidence to see my two main research specialisms appearing side by side in your Archæology column ('Baffling burials' FT378:18) – and I feel I should comment on errors in both of them. Philip de Jersey is quoted as saying that the complete absence of wrist and hand bones in the skeleton from Guernsey could be the result of leprosy, were the feet not so well preserved. This is an incorrect assumption of the effect of leprosy on the skeleton but one that is still often presented in mainstream media and popular culture. The disease affects the peripheral nerves and can lead to paralysis and loss of feeling in the extremities, with resultant unwitting self-mutilation of hands and feet. It can also lead to loss of bone in the hands, feet and facial skeleton, but even in extremely severe cases of the disease in mediæval skeletons, the wrist bones and metacarpals (bones in the palm) are still present, even if the fingers may be partially or almost completely destroyed.

The report on the decapitations from Suffolk states that it was a widely practised burial rite in Roman Britain. I would argue that this is an simplified assumption about a practice which is extremely varied in its appearance and mechanisms, with execution probably accounting for the majority of the cases, whilst cases of burial ritual and human sacrifice (live or otherwise, though I think there is convinc-

ing evidence for the former in a few examples) are much rarer. Andrew Peachey states that he sees no evidence for execution as the types of incisions were not consistent with this, but I have seen a great variety of forms of sharp-force trauma in skeletons and with a wide variety of locations on the neck that I regard as entirely consistent with execution. Media reports about this site were also posted in an online archæological forum (BAJR) to which I belong and I'm happy to say that this led to a discussion between myself and Andrew Peachey about the site and its interpretation, so hopefully more insight can be gained with future research and possible collaboration. Watch this space!

Dr Katie Tucker

Visiting Fellow in Osteoarchæology, University of Winchester

Moon landing

Reading the article 'Ghosts and the Moon' [FT376:18-20], whose introduction and accompanying photograph concerned Professor Archie Roy, the Scottish astronomer with an interest in the paranormal, reminded me of the time I appeared on a TV programme with him some years ago. The programme concerned an anniversary of the first Moon landing, possibly the 30th. I was working as Media Relations Director for William Hill bookmakers and was there to tell the story of the betting on when man would first walk on the Moon – as a result of which a young man called David Threlfall won £10,000 from a bet he placed

at the age of 26 in 1964 of £10 at odds of 1000/1 with William Hill that the first Moon landing would take place in or before 1971. Shortly after collecting his winnings, Threlfall bought a fast sports car, in which, sadly, he died as the result of a crash.

Professor Roy told me that not long before the Moon landing he had been touring US laboratories where he saw at first hand how seriously



Spectral figure

I was clearing out my parents' house recently and came across this photo in an early family photo album. It apparently shows my father's lodgings in Coventry in the early 1950s. However, there is a transparent figure seated in the armchair, with the right arm, shoulder and some of the head visible. As my father never drew my attention to this photograph, I don't know its circumstances or the exact location. I don't have the negative and the print itself is very fragile.

Ed Hodson *Winchester*

Editor's note: The mundane explanation is double exposure, but it's a curious image nonetheless.

they were taking the 'space race' against the Russians. "They told me they were determined to land a man on the Moon before the end of the Sixties. After this I enquired about the betting odds available and was able to stake a substantial amount at odds ranging from 66/1 to 150/1." He didn't tell me precisely how much he won but confirmed that it was a substantial four-figure sum.

Some time after the Moon landing stories (that it had never really happened) began to circulate and while I was working for Hills I frequently laid odds of 500/1 to sceptical punters that the US President would ever officially confirm that the Moon landing was a hoax. No one was ever paid.

Graham Sharpe

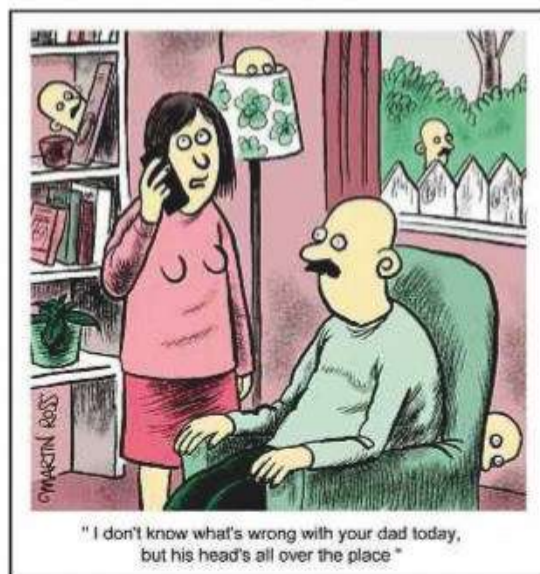
Hatch End, Middlesex

Nature of grief

Following my acting as primary carer for my mother during her terminal battle with cancer, I read numerous books on death, deathbed visitants and near-

death experiences – and of course a number of books by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (see 'Mythconceptions 235: The Five Stages of Grief', FT378:25). I remember reading that later into her career, Kübler-Ross herself noted that the *stages* are not linear and that they could occur in any order, repeating themselves in any order at any time and that not everybody would experience all stages. In fact she regretted calling them stages because of the chronological implication and it has been suggested that they be named *symptoms* instead.

Many medics and bereavement counsellors understand that grief is particular to both the dying and those mourning, and can manifest in numerous ways, some seemingly odd or unexpected, and that the Five Stages are just some of the commonly experienced symptoms. Alas, there seem to be some people working in the field that still think the Five Stages are a definitive road map and that each stage should be met and passed in the 'correct' order. Nobody can tell another how to grieve as it is a singular,



MARTIN ROSS



personal path, but there are those who can responsibly help people along that path.
Andy Paciorek
Durham

Lost people of the North

One of my colleagues in Moscow (I'm here for four weeks or so every year) is mainly interested in cryptozoology, but has wider interests in folklore and strange peoples. Now he's drawn my attention to this article in *Dendrochronologia* by Maya O Sidorova et al (2017): "First dendro-archæological evidence of a completely excavated mediæval settlement in the extreme north of Western Siberia" (www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1125786516301187).

It begins: "Archæological research at the high-northern latitudes is generally sparse, and complete settlement excavations are rare", and proceeds to mainly discuss tree ring-based dating of an excavated settlement, dated to around the time of the Norman Conquest and in use for a couple of hundred years. This in an area believed mainly to be inhabited by nomads, due to short summers and very cold winters. Quite an elaborate affair with rectangular timber houses apparently covered with turf, with some resemblance to Sami and Icelandic buildings.

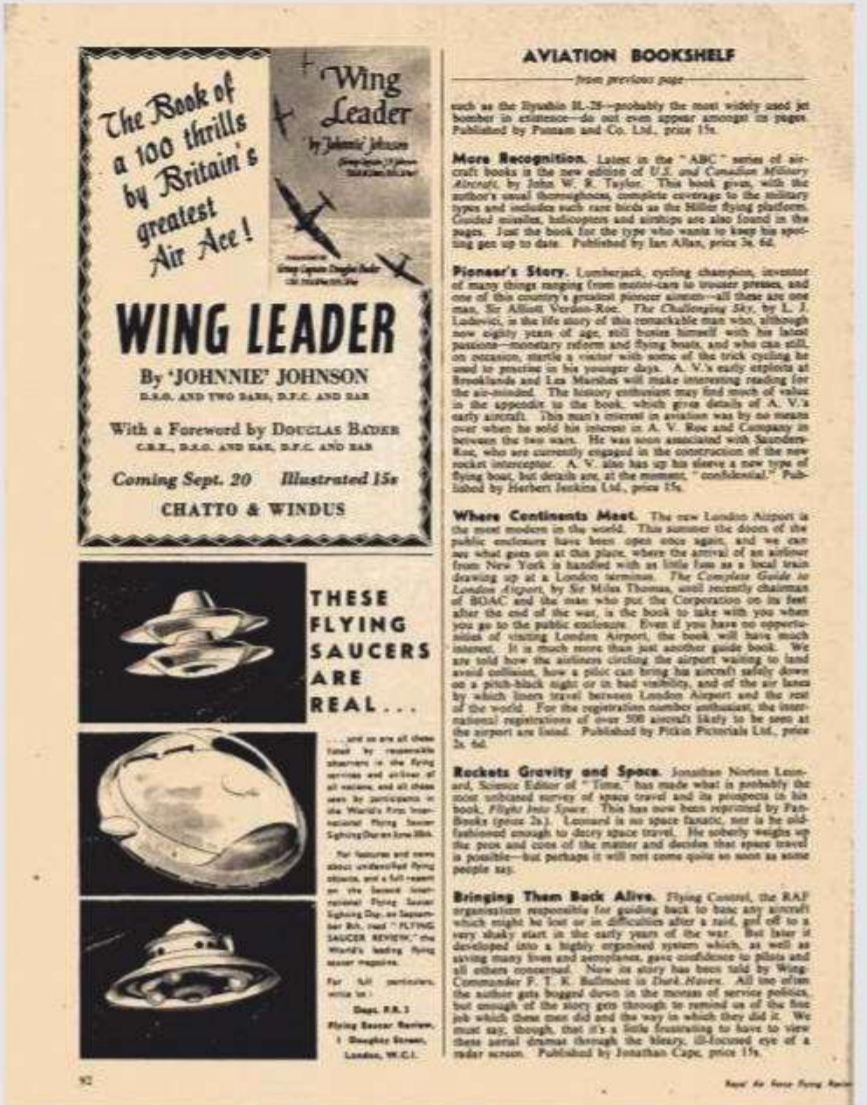
Who built these and what happened to them? My colleague is excited by the parallels with legends of a lost people in the far North, and by the similarities with some elf, dwarf and Sidhe lore in Western Europe. The article itself notes:

"Regarding the origin of the Buchta Nakhodka inhabitants, I. Lepekhins, who travelled to the Nenets tundra in the second half of the 18th century, wrote: 'All Samoyadskaya land (from the Kanin Peninsula to the lower reaches of the Yenisei River) in the present-day Mezenskaya area is filled with abandoned dwellings of an ancient people. They can be found in many places, by lakes in the tundra and in forests, built by streams

in the mountains and hills, where caves have openings that resemble doors. Now in the caves furnaces abide, and iron, copper and clay remains of household utensils are found alongside human remains... According to the Samoyeds, these abandoned homes belong to somebody invisible actually called Sirte in Samoyad' (Homich, 1970). This is a reference to an article in the journal *Folklore and ethnography* (IM). Furthermore, there are legends in Nenets folklore about the legendary mediæval sedentary Sihirtya people, who lived on the territory. In legends, they are pictured as short, light-eyed (white-eyed) people, who lived in the 'sand hills', hunted wild deer and went fishing in small boats, rode dogs and had a reputation as metal forgers renowned for their metallic settlement wares (Homich, 1970; Vasiliev, 1970; Golovnev, 2004). Having compared available historical and ethnographic information with the data obtained from the archæological site, certain relationships between residents of the Buchta Nakhodka settlement and the Sihirtya people can be established.

"First of all, there are architectural similarities, the Sihirtya sand hill correlates well with the turf fortification structures that possibly constitute a single hill-like construction. Secondly, local Nenets called this archæological site the Hill of Sirte (Lashuk, 1968). Thirdly, according to the previous archæo-zoological research, hunting wild reindeer and fishing were the primary occupations both for the Buchta Nakhodka residents and the Sihirtya people (Vizgalov et al., 2013). In this case, we expect that the Sihirtya people lived on the archæological site of the Buchta Nakhodka." (Sirtya Hills – Sidhe Hills?? Well, I guess many peoples will have developed turf and similar coverings...)

For a news report of a different archæological investigation ("an ancient temple") see https://sputniknews.com/art_living/201507011024082661/. "Local Nenets people have a legend that from time to time, the frozen earth at the site opens



"Real" flying saucers

The letter from Mark Reeve [FT37:76] concerning a 1971 advertisement about UFOs brought to mind one I had seen in the Royal Air Force *Flying Review* of September 1956. I had kept the magazine because it contained the Farnborough Preview with splendid photographs and descriptions of the latest jets – essential reading for any 13-year-old of my generation. On page 92 there was a quarter page advertisement, with pictures, which fired my imagination even further, headlined "These Flying Saucers are Real". It was reporting on the world's first International Flying Saucer Sighting Day on June 30th and plugging the *Flying Saucer Review*. Here we are nearly 63 years later and still none the wiser.

Terry Warburton, By email

up and forms an entrance to the underground Kingdom of Sirtya, a people who live underground and predate the coming of Nenets people to the area... Archæological expeditions have found the artefacts from the site to date from the sixth to the 14th century, with a distinct break in the type of artefacts found dated after the ninth century..." and "Ritual sacrifice remains part of the tradition in the area, although much more modest than in days past, when reindeer were sacrificed to deities."

I haven't been able to down-

load the Homich article (yet); a little googling came up with a unsourced account of Sirtye on a RPG blog (<http://udan-adan.blogspot.com/2016/04/monsters-from-central-asian-mythology-9.html>) and an equally unsourced item with some photos of Sirtye in (recent) carvings (<http://www.circumarctic.com/news/sirtya/>).

The Sirtya (or Sihirtya) people are probably just one of a large number of largely unexplored topics in this region of the world.

Ian Miles

Laboratory of Economics of Innovation, Moscow

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Burning tree

I was a police officer in the 1990s, stationed at Harworth Police station. During a night shift one summer sometime between 1995 and 1999, I was out on mobile patrol with a colleague in north Nottinghamshire. We were dispatched to a village to deal with an incident. It was 2am and the roads were clear. Our journey took us along a two-mile (3.2km) open stretch of road between the villages of Styrrup and Oldcotes.

Having dealt with the incident, we were travelling back about 45 minutes later along the same road, when I saw something flickering in a field on our right. I stopped the car and saw the flickering was a fire in a tree about 200 yards into the field. Oddly, not all the tree was ablaze – just a section about 25ft (7.6m) from the ground. The fire was about 2ft across, or a bit more. We walked towards the tree, checking the ground for footprints and vehicle tracks, but found neither.

Closer to the tree it soon became apparent that no one could have climbed up to start the fire, as there were no branches within easy reach. There were no buildings, power lines or any other structures visible anywhere nearby that might offer an explanation and we were at a loss as to what or who was to blame. We couldn't even attribute the cause to a lightning strike, as there wasn't a cloud in the sky. All we could say for certain was the tree wasn't alight when we passed by a short time earlier. The flames didn't appear to be overly intense and there seemed to be little risk that the fire would spread. The fire began to die down and we left before it burnt out.

What could have caused it? A meteorite? Spontaneous combustion? Or what?

Michael Smith
Cotham, Nottinghamshire



Bending puzzle

About 15 years ago I took a holiday in Goa. I had packed a large and substantial suitcase and included, towards the centre of the packing, a piece of knitting-in-progress. This consisted of about half of the back of a heavy knit Aran-type sweater held on heavy knitting needles. The piece was in the traditional arrangement of all the stitches held on one needle and that and the other empty needle thrust through a big ball of yarn. On arriving in Goa after a 10-hour flight and no interruptions, one needle was found to be bent at an angle of about 30 degrees with an abrupt angle, the rest of the needle being perfectly straight. It took my then husband quite a bit of effort to straighten it out. I remember thinking "What on earth?" I accepted it at the time, but as I remember it now, the weirder it gets.

Rosalinda D' Silva
Morbihan, France

Hexham fairies

Earlier this year I moved into a 200-year-old farm cottage. I love it – but soon after I got settled in I started to notice

"I stopped the car and saw that the flickering was a fire in a tree about 200 yards into the field"

things had moved when I had not moved them. I put it down to draughts or the cat as no one else lives with me. The cat was more than usually skittish, having mad 10 minutes when she would jump and chase things I couldn't see. A couple of times she leapt a foot in the air from a deep sleep, which she had never done before. A fluffy toy llama in particular kept moving around. I never saw the cat take an interest in it but it was often several feet from where I had left it. On one occasion I had let the cat out the front and gone out the back myself and when I came back in the llama was standing up on the rug 10ft [3m] away from where I left it. A few days later I came down to discover that a stained glass roundel had been taken off the window and was laid neatly on the sill, 4ft [1.2m] down, completely undamaged and with the chain

taut as though it were still hanging. The sucker hook was laid equally neatly at the other end of the sill.

I discussed these strange events with a neighbour, who said she experiences similar phenomena and often loses things only for them to turn up later exactly where she had already looked. I asked another older neighbour. She looked at me as if I were daft and said "Why, it's the fairies of course! What for do you think I have all the bells and wind chimes and little lights? You have to keep them happy or they play mischief." She asked what I had done that might have upset them. I had hung a new iron poker up at the fireplace but then I remembered that I had got rid of a stone plinth from a fireplace in 1970s style. Inside it were several single children's shoes and a few bits of toys – all from the 1970s, but could they have been put there to lay the fairies?

Anyway, now I ask the fairies before I change things and I share things with them. There have been no more strange happenings and the cat is much more settled.

Liz Harrington
Hexham, Northumberland

Making contact

In the mid 1990s, before mobile phones were affordable and commonplace, I communicated using a small pager device. These only had the facility to send and receive text messages. One day, while I was busy painting a house, the image of an old friend from the past drifted into my mind. We had not seen one another for more than a decade and I had not thought of him since. Seconds later, my pager buzzed with a message from my mother, saying that this very same old friend of mine had, just minutes earlier, called her at my old family home, asked nothing except how I was and for her to please remember him to me. He had then rang off with no more than a goodbye, not wanting to give or exchange any contact details. I never saw, heard of, or heard from him again.

Stefan Badham

Portsmouth, Hampshire

Keys in limbo

In 1989 I was in the process of buying a Peugeot 306 from my brother Alan. On my way home from work I stopped at his house for a chat. The Peugeot was on his front drive. My brother gave me the car keys, but I said I wasn't going to take the car then, but would collect it the next day. Returning home, I put the keys on the kitchen work surface.

At 11am the next morning, Alan phoned asking me to bring the keys over, as he wanted to get his wife's car out of the garage and the Peugeot was blocking her in. I told him I'd bring them over within 20 minutes – but the damned keys were nowhere to be found. During the next three hours I became like a man possessed, shouting and accusing my wife of moving them. I searched everywhere, including wardrobes, rubbish bins and the garden. I had a blazing row with my brother, who kept phoning asking where I was, and why I hadn't put the keys in a Safe Place. Finally, after my wife had fled to her sister's in tears, I had to get the AA out to open the car, and my brother got another ignition key from the



car's previous owner.

Arriving home from work a week later, I walked into the front room and there were the missing keys, underneath a nest of tables in full view. I called my wife and we looked at each other in disbelief. If the keys had been there a week earlier, there is no doubt at all we would have seen them.

P Wright

Datchet, Berkshire

Watch replacement

I am one of three brothers. Our father died in 2005. He had often told us of his World War II experiences, and we decided that year, as a holiday, to follow as closely as possible the journey he had made from the Normandy beaches to Flensburg in Schleswig-Holstein. He made some of the journey by motorbike, but we made it by public transport. This involved us, one warm afternoon, changing trains at a station near the Dutch-German border. The Dutch train was slightly late, the connection tight, and we had to sprint across the station to catch the German train. We caught it, but I then realised I had left my jacket on the Dutch train. It contained my wallet and credit cards, and also my wristwatch, which for some reason I wasn't wearing. I reported the wallet lost, had the cards cancelled, and got on with the holiday. I didn't replace jacket, wallet or watch while on holiday; time did not permit.

The holiday over, I returned to my flat in Wimbledon quite late on a Wednesday night. The bin men were due very early Thursday morning. Even though I had been away, I had a full bag of rubbish, and I went to put it out. Three of the four communal bins for my block of flats were full, but the other was practically empty. I say "practically" because as I was about to place the bag in this bin I noticed a wristwatch glinting at the bottom. The steel fastening fitted my wrist exactly. The watch was still going and I adopted it; I have it on as I write. The battery runs down about once a year, but otherwise it keeps good time.

My neighbourhood is, I guess, neither affluent nor poor. Someone could have tired of their watch and thrown it away. It is also, I think, a low crime area, so it is unlikely anyone would have mugged someone for this watch, a Casio Edifice, seen police coming and thrown it away, planning to retrieve it later. It is not a luxury item like a Rolex. The only odd thing about this story is the time element; I lose a watch and a week later find a watch. Have readers any other odd 'lost and found' anecdotes?

Anthony Scales

Wimbledon, London

A tale of two rings

A few years ago my husband went on a two-hour motorcycle ride with a friend who came

over to the house. When they came back he took off his gloves and noticed that his wedding ring was missing. Both of us were upset, since it was a custom-made titanium ring with inscription. My husband went back out to retrace his route and look for it. He was gone for about 20 minutes and then was back in the garage taking off his gear. I asked "Did you find it?" and he approached me with a closed fist and opened it up. At first I thought it was his ring, but then realised it was another man's wedding ring. It had evidently been outside for many years and was quite beat up. It was a simple white gold band with no distinguishing characteristics.

My husband told me that he was looking around where he thought his ring was and instead found the other ring. Later that evening I asked him some more about it. He had found it in a nearby abandoned house, built around 1840. I thought that was a strange place for him to have stopped earlier, so I asked what he was doing there, and if he had stopped there and taken off his gloves. Was that why he thought his ring would be there? My husband looked at me and said, "No, we didn't stop there earlier". So naturally I asked him why on earth did he imagine that he would find his ring there. He said he just had a really strong feeling that it would be there. The other man's wedding ring is still in a box in my house to this day. About a year later, my husband got some chairs and tables out of our shed for a garden party. The next day, I was on my way back to the shed to put something away and I looked down and saw a ring on a paving stone. It was my husband's missing wedding ring. He had probably lost it the previous summer when it fell into one of the folding chairs while putting it away, and then fell out again at next use. It was already miraculous that with all the grass that it fell onto a paving stone and was visible. Of course what that meant is that he never lost the ring on the motorcycle ride in the first place.

Kathleen Schuelke

Pinckney, Michigan

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS 2 HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

IN 1958, BURROUGHS MOVED TO PARIS, WHERE HE LIVED IN A CHEAP HOTEL WITH SOME FRIENDS. HE BEGAN TO EXPERIMENT WITH MIRROR-GAZING...



STRANGE THINGS BEGAN TO HAPPEN - WITNESSED AND REPORTED BY HIS FRIENDS...



BURROUGHS' ROOM BEGAN TO STINK OF SULPHUR...



...AND THE MIRROR VISIONS BECAME MORE TERRIFYING!



IN THE MID-60s BURROUGHS MOVED TO LONDON, WHERE HE BECAME MORE BAD-TEMPERED! HE BEGAN SLAPPING CURSES ON PEOPLE AGAIN! ONE OF HIS VICTIMS WAS ALAN WATSON, WHO WAS SUNNING HIMSELF AND LISTENING TO A MUSIC CASSETTE WHEN SUDDENLY THE MUSIC CHANGED INTO...

...THE MOCKING VOICE OF WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS HIMSELF!



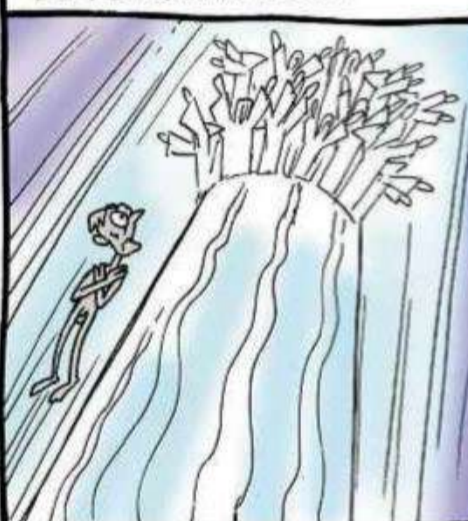
WHEN THE WAITERS AT A SOHO COFFEE BAR WERE RUDE TO HIM, HE PUT A CURSE ON THE PLACE AND WAS DELIGHTED WHEN IT CLOSED A FEW WEEKS LATER...



FOR A WHILE, BURROUGHS WAS A KEEN FOLLOWER OF SCIENTOLOGY! IT BECAME CLEAR TO HIM THAT HE HAD LIVED MANY FORMER LIVES - IN ANCIENT EGYPT, FOR ONE!



HE ALSO EXPERIMENTED WITH OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES...



LATE IN LIFE, BURROUGHS MOVED TO THE RURAL TOWN OF LAWRENCE, KANSAS! HE ADOPTED LOTS OF CATS, WHO WERE BOTH PSYCHIC FAMILIARS AND PEOPLE HE HAD KNOWN IN PAST LIVES!



HE CONTINUED TO PUT CURSES ON HIS ENEMIES, - ESPECIALLY CRITICS WHO PANNED HIS NOVELS - BUT THEY WERE Milder NOW...



IN THE LAST DECADE OF HIS LIFE, BURROUGHS BECAME A HUGE INFLUENCE ON THE NEW MODE OF OCCULTISM CALLED CHAOS MAGICK... HIS DISCIPLES INCLUDED GENESIS P. ORRIDGE...



SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH IN 1997, BURROUGHS WAS INITIATED INTO THE CHAOS MAGICK GROUP THE ILLUMINATES OF THANATEROS...



BURROUGHS' BIOGRAPHER TED MORGAN "THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT BURROUGHS WAS HIS BELIEF IN THE MAGICAL UNIVERSE!"

COMING NEXT MONTH



WITCHCRAFT MURDER

REOPENING THE FILE ON THE
LOWER QUINTON KILLING



BLOOD ON THE FIELDS

RURAL GOTHIC AND THE FOLK
HORROR REVIVAL



SEX ON THE BRAIN,
EARTHQUAKE LIGHTS,
THE BLACK FLASH,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 381

ON SALE 20 JUNE 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A cassowary, considered the world's most dangerous bird, attacked and killed its owner when the man fell on his farm in northern Florida on 12 April. Similar in appearance to emus, cassowaries are native to Australia and New Guinea. They can stand up to 6ft (1.8m) tall, weigh more than 130lb (60kg) and run up to 30mph (48km/h). The flightless bird used its 5in (12.7cm) dagger-like claws to kill Marvin Hajos, 75, on the property near Gainesville. He was taken to hospital where he died from his injuries. He had kept exotic animals for decades and was breeding cassowaries. The bird involved in the incident remained at the property. In *Living Birds of the World* (1958), Ernest Gilliard described the cassowary claw as "a long straight murderous nail which can sever an arm or eviscerate an abdomen with ease. There are many records of natives being killed by this bird." *BBC News*, 14 April; *Times*, *D.Telegraph*, 16 April 2019.

On 17 April a pet deer killed Paul McDonald, 46, and injured his wife Mandi, 45, shortly after they entered the animal's enclosure on their property in Moyhu, Victoria. The attack occurred during mating season when the animals are bad tempered. Police shot the deer before the couple could get medical treatment, due to concerns over the paramedic's safety. The stag – which the family had kept for about two years – was a cross between a red deer and an elk. Farmed deer tend to be more aggressive than those in the wild. Deer were introduced to Australia in the 19th century and are regarded as a pest, with up to a million wild deer in Victoria alone. *[R] straitstimes.com*, 17 April; *Metro*, 18 April 2019.

A vulture caused a crash that killed a married couple on 20 April as they rode a motorbike in southern Kansas. The bird came out of a ditch and struck 42-year-old Brandon Husband in the head on a rural road northwest of Medicine Lodge. The motorbike then went off the road, struck a barbed wire fence and overturned. Husband died at the scene, and his wife Jennifer, 43, was pronounced dead at a hospital. Neither was wearing a helmet. *CBS News*, 22 April 2019.

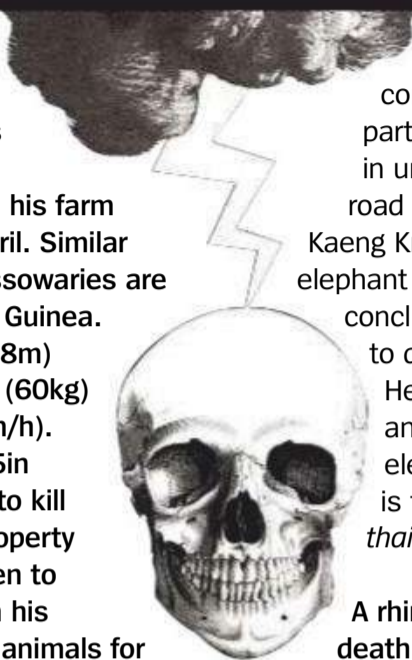
On 14 February a Thai woman called Saichon Srisawat, 50, left her house to do some washing at her mother's house. When she didn't come back for dinner her husband Niphon Yimlamai, 71, was

concerned. Next day a search party discovered her naked body in undergrowth by the side of the road near her mother's house in the Kaeng Krachan national park. There were elephant footprints all around and they concluded she had been trampled to death by at least two elephants. Her arms and legs were all broken and her skull fractured. Had the elephants stolen her clothes – or is this a case of rape cover-up? *thaivisa.com*, 16 Feb 2019.

A rhino poacher was trampled to death by an elephant then eaten by a pride of lions in South Africa's 7,700 square mile Kruger National Park on 2 April. Rather than carry him home and slow themselves down, his fellow poachers carried his body to a road so that passers-by could find it in the morning. Four of the poachers were arrested the following day and confessed to what had happened. After a two-day search, park rangers found all that was left of the hapless hunter: a skull and a pair of trousers. They believed he had been eaten by a pride of lions. Kruger National Park has an ongoing problem with poaching and there remains a strong demand for rhino horn in Asian countries. On 6 April, Hong Kong airport authorities seized the biggest haul of rhino horn in five years, valued at £1.6 million. In July 2018, two (or possibly three) rhino poachers were eaten by a lion pride in South Africa's Sibuya reserve **[FT374:80]**. *BBC News*, 7 April; *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, 8 April 2019.

Michal Prasek, 34, was mauled to death by a lion caged at his house in the village of Zdechov, eastern Czech Republic. He owned the nine-year-old big cat and a lioness for breeding. His father found his body in the lion's cage, which had been locked from the inside. The animals – living in separate pens – were shot dead by police. Prasek made headlines last summer after a cyclist collided with a lioness he was walking on a leash. After intervention by police, the incident was deemed a traffic accident. *BBC News*, 5 Mar 2019.

Thai fisherman Uthai Ngamwaja, 41, went with friends to catch fish at a pond near his house. He caught one by hand and trapped another under his foot. While he was bending down to retrieve the latter he put the first one between his lips and bit on it, but it wriggled free and went down his throat. His friends tried to dislodge the fish, but only blood came up. Uthai died on the way to hospital. *thaivisa.com*, 15 Mar 2019.



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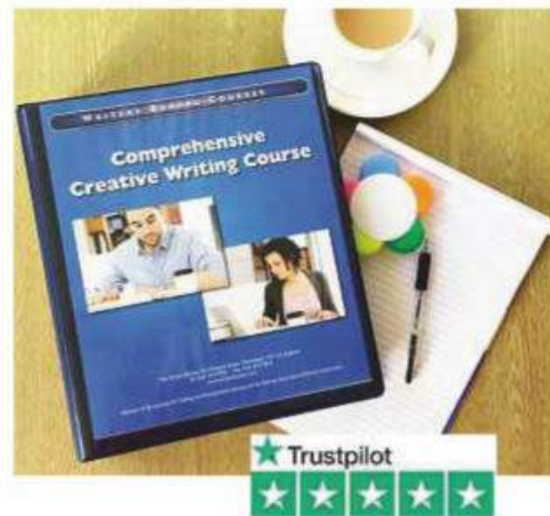
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